micro Adventurer

The computer strategy and simulation magazine

September 1984 75p

Explore Crasimoff's world

You haven't lived until you've died in MUD

Hulk tips

Can you solve the riddle of the Sphinx?



WIN £200 of software from Adventure International

micro Adventurer

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SUNSHINE

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EDITORIAL

LORDS OF MIDNIGHT is a new departure for adventure games. It is a multi-player game, in that scenes and events can be viewed from more than one vantage point. It is also the first game to bring another world to life through the use of graphics rather than text.

The ability to switch from one character to another, or to allow other players to assume differing personae, is something which no other adventure game has successfully attempted.

This is not to say that Mike Singleton's game is flawless — it does have faults, notably interior scenes of keeps and citadels are not displayed and the game itself can become overly complex. Nevertheless, Lords of Midnight is still a great deal more fun to play than most other adventures. And the graphics are stunning.

Another game which is rapidly growing in popularity is MUD — that peculiarly apt acronym for Multi User Dungeon. Devised by Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle, MUD is run on Essex University's DEC 10. The game allows different players, both inside and outside the university, to participate at the same time.

Within the next two to three years, if not sooner, it should be possible to devise an interactive adventure game involving thousands of players. Linked to a central computer by modem, adventurers will be able to battle for global supremacy or search for the holy grail. Opponents and allies will be real live people, not computer generated facsimiles.

The technology is available now, although it is still fairly expensive. If British Telecom could only be persuaded to reduce its rates for data transmission, such an adventure game might be running now. Certainly, with companies such as Century buying up the rights to MUD, it should not be too long before some such system is in operation. I believe that this type of game is going to prove far more popular than anyone now suspects.

LETTERS

Send your hints, successes, complaints and compliments to Letters Page, Micro Adventurer, 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2R 3LD

Beyond the review

I'M GLAD your reviewer found *Beyond the Arcade* (my book on computer adventures and wargames) a nice afternoon's read, but maybe he should have taken a bit of the evening too, as there are quite a few mistakes in the review, viz.:

(1) *'A noticeably strong bias to American computers like the Atari, Apple, Pet and IBM'.* In fact the bias to British computers is so strong that the advertisement for the book in my own magazine warned US readers about it. Virtually *all* the games in the adventure section are for the Spectrum, Dragon or BBC. The whole book has only one reference each to the Pet and the IBM PC, both warning off new purchasers looking for games machines). The wargames section does have a variety of Atari and Apple games featured prominently, but unfortunately that's where the best wargames are to be found, as Laurence Miller's *Micro Adventurer* series has shown.

(2) *'No reference to Infocom or Scott Adams'.* Of course there is. See pp 24-27. The reference to Infocom is admittedly only in passing, because it's an American firm with most of its games not available to most UK users.

(3) *'Palmer, I believe, wanted to write a detailed volume about Play-By-Mail games, and was pressured into including Computer adventures'.* This is news to me. The problem is that very specialised books have to be very expensive. I do tend to agree with the reviewer that £6.95 is a steep price, but it does make it possible to publish a book exclusively devoted to these two areas. A book only about PBM would probably have to be priced at £12 to interest a publisher. The objective of *Beyond the Arcade* is to interest readers involved in one aspect of 'intelligent' gaming and introduce them to the others; I don't think either a very specialised book or a much broader one could achieve this.

Nicky Palmer

Help database

I OFFERED help for several adventures in July's *MAD*, and was surprised to receive at least 20 enquiries. I now intend to write a help database which will work out the most common problems adventurers around the country face. I'll let you have any interesting results!

Also in the August issue, I saw my own plea for help in Snowball. I completed the game two months ago, so please, everyone, don't send help — but I'll willingly provide it.

Dave Linsley
8 Manor House Road
Jesmond
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
NE2 2LU

Charts

RECENTLY purchasing my first issue of *Micro Adventurer*, I was very pleased to see Adventure Contact.

How about having a chart for the top ten adventure games for different computers?

C. Taylor
Birstwith
North Yorks.

Topical tips

I CAN OFFER any reader maps, hints, and tips for *The Hobbit*, and maps for the first level of Level 9's *Colossal Cave*.

I also have a map of *Valhalla*, showing the locations of Ofnir, Drapnir, Skornir, and Felstrong. I am looking for Skalir — if anyone knows where it is, please tell me.

Finally, a few tips for *Pirate's Cove;* pirates like rum, crocodiles like fish, and snakes don't like parrots.

Don't forget to send an SAE.

John Rundle
26, Western Road
Aldershot
Hants
GU11 3PL

Identity problem

FLATTERING though I found it to have my humble scrawl mistaken for Kevin Bergin's excellent prose, the Captain at the controls of the August Flight Simulator review was

Yours Truly
Tony Bridge

Sub stopper

IN JULY'S issue, Tony Bridge comments that he does not get much space. How I agree with him! On the cover of the magazine, it says *Micro Adventurer*, but we get articles about what hardware and software we are likely to be using in the future, and so on. Interesting, yes, but hardly deserving three and a half pages.

One of the main reasons I buy your magazine, along with many other readers, I'm sure, is to get a few hints, clues, and tips about the various games I'm playing. So come on, let's have a great magazine, not just a good one — otherwise when my sub runs out I, for one, won't be renewing.

Nigel Morse
Doncaster

Bartle spekes

LIKED the article by Gren Hatton about Future Gaming, since he managed to contain himself to present technology rather than predict technological advances which are "just around the corner".

He does seem, however, to have an inaccurate view of Essex University's computing facilities. In common with most other universities, we don't have hundreds of megabytes of memory going spare. That's why *MUD* is only playable at really stupid hours, just because we can't get that kind of memory during the day. Also, games aren't intellectually acceptable on University machines unless they're chess, and it's the computing service people (the ones who maintain the machine and its software) who have given us the support, rather than Computing Science academics. Would that I DID have quantities of dumb terminals lying about as Gren seems to believe. Assuming he WAS talking about Essex when he mentioned Universities, of course — we're the only one in Britain doing this sort of thing, but there's at least one in the USA too. And they really DO have the computing power he describes at their disposal!

I'd also like to talk about another of Gren's points, namely that networked systems are the "next step" after many of the things he mentions in his article have already happened. Although screens full of moving pictures and zappy sound-effects may improve a game, they still don't alter the form of the game itself. 3D films (and games?) are pretty good, but they're still just a variation on a theme. The point about multi-user adventures is that they're not just ordinary games with bells & whistles, they're a kind of game unto themselves, unlike anything else on the market at present. They're so much more fun to play that frankly they leave classic adventures for dead. If you played an adventure with all the equipment Gren envisages, then played it without, you'd still be able to live with it. Once you've played a multi-user adventure, however, single-user games never look the same again. I realise this sounds a bit like an advert for *MUD*, and of course I'm biased seeing as how I wrote it, but I hope you see what I'm getting at.

Richard Bartle
University of Essex



We can't show you all the views of the Lords of Midnight, there are 32,000!







We've invented a new programming technique called Landscaping, creating a completely new kind of game, the EPIC.

You'll get the chance to shape the characters into your own fantasy novel by playing out the different roles in the ever changing world of Midnight.

BEYOND

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NEWS DESK

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Games Workshop goes soft

GAMES WORKSHOP is publishing four software titles in October. Angus Ryall, software marketing manager, says that the four will be *Battlecars, Journey's End, D-Day*, and *Argent Warrior*.

Battlecars is a computerised version of the Ian Livingstone boardgame (see review, page 32) set in an anarchic future where the major spectator sport is a cross between stock car racing and World War Two.

Battlecars will be for two players, and will feature a five part split screen. The combat displays will show each player's immediate surroundings, where they are in relation to each other, the damage level, ammunition supply, and speed of each car.

The coding on *Battlecars* is by Slug, the programming team responsible for *Rebelstar Raiders*, who left Red Shift in June and are now freelancing.

Journey's End is a graphic arcade-adventure game in three parts' featuring battle magic. Jon Sutherland, Games Workshop's advertising manager, claims that it will be *"Dungeon and Dragons* for computers." The coding is by Mr Biggie Software, a group of computer science graduates from Manchester.

D-Day is a conventional computer wargame covering the invasion of Europe in 1944. Four scrolling maps will cover the five beachheads, and the players will control tanks, infantry, artillery and aircraft. Coding is by the Dagenham Design Cell.



Russell Clarke of Games Workshop

Argent Warrior is the most exciting of the four games. Designed using *The Quill*, extra programming makes its origins unrecognisable.

Argent Warrior is a text adventure, with some graphics. Games Workshop's only in house program, the creative concept came from Jamie Thomson and Steve Williams, and the coding is by Russell Clarke and Mike McKeown.

According to Russell, the player is the son of a hero who liberated a magical land from the rule of the demon lord Malmort. Twenty years have passed and the demon has returned. The player's task is to find the mystical weapons which his late father used last time around, and settle Malmort's hash. These weapons — the Hands of Silver and Gold and the Crown of Chaos — will not be easy to find, and are well protected. The program is 96K in all, and runs in two parts.

All four titles will be initially available for the Spectrum 48K, at a price of £7.95. Games Workshop plans Commodore 64 versions for mid November, and will be distributing in America.

Fame Quest

BRAINGAMES, the newly formed leisure division of Amplicon Electronics, has released two titles for the Commodore 64 and Spectrum.

Election Trail is a simulation of the American electoral system. The player is the Republican candidate, and has to secure votes by judicious use of campaign funds, manipulation of the media, and other nefarious activities.

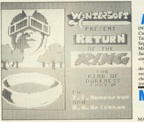
In *Fame Quest*, the player begins as a lowly knight, and struggles to rise through the ranks by vanquishing various opponents. The game uses a split screen and features a map of the countryside.

The initial design for both games is the work of Dave Rotor, who runs Adventureworlds, which specialises in table top and board wargames. The game development and coding are by Peter Woods, Amplicon's Managing Director. The same team has been responsible for two of Commodore's games, *Highflyer*, an airline management game, and *Rail Boss*, about the heady days of the Iron Horse in America.



Peter Woods of Braingames

Election Trail and *Fame Quest* are available on disc for the Commodore 64 at £9.95, and on cassette for the Commodore and Spectrum 48K at £7.95.



RETURN OF THE RING is the sequel to Wintersoft's best-selling game for the Dragon 32, The Ring of Darkness.

Many of the characters the player will encounter have 'free will', and are capable of doing almost anything that the player can do.

Written entirely in machine code, Return of the Ring *retails at £9.95.*

Tales of Adventure

INFOCOM will be releasing *Cutthroats*, the third in the Tales of Adventure series, on September 15. Written by Michael Berlyn, the author of *Suspended* and *Infidel*, the coding is by Jerry Wolper.

The player is a deep sea diver down on his luck, who is recruited by a group of shady characters hunting for sunken treasure. It costs $39.95.

Magra still wrathful

MASTERTRONIC has taken over *The Wrath of Magra* from the defunct Carnell, and will be republishing it under a new label, Mastervsion. It will be for the Spectrum 48K, at £12.50.

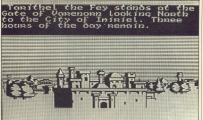
Compunet

ADVENTURE GAMES will be available on Compunet, the networking system being set up by Commodore. Gail Wellington, Commodore UK's Software Manager, says that the company is close to an agreement with Mister Micro, whereby the Manchester based software house will write a series of linked adventure programs.

Each program will be an episode in a continuing series, according to Gail "like a soap opera, or one of the old adventure serials they used to show in the Thirties and Forties."

Jim Gregory of Mister Micro aims to have a new game every fortnight, all with text and graphics. The programs will be available in the "Software Park" section of Compunet, and users will be able to download them and save to disc.

Commodore is also looking at ideas for multi-player games, along the lines of *MUD*. Nothing has yet been finalised, however.



***Micro Adventurer* brings you the first pictures of *Doomdark's Revenge*, the sequel to *Lords of Midnight*. Morkin has been kidnapped by Doomdark's daughter, and Tarithel the Fey, daughter of the Lord of Dreams, must rescue him, with the aid of some familiar faces. The scenery is radically different to that of Midnight, and from what Mike has been telling us, the game system has been made more sophisticated as well. Beyond has said the game will be launched sometime in the autumn. Whenever it does come out, it looks, from what we have seen, well worth the wait!**

Mail boxes

MITRE GAMES, which runs the play by mail games *Starmaster* and *Tribes of Crane* in the UK, has signed a deal with Games Workshop.

Boxed sets of both games, containing the rules, all the reference sheets needed, and two free turns will be launched at Games Day (London, September 1-2), at £9.95, and distributed by Games Workshop in this country and the US.

Games Day

GAMES DAY '84 will be held at the Royal Horticultural Society's New Hall in Greycoat Street, London, on September 1 and 2.

As in the past, the two day event, organised by Games Workshop, will feature all sorts of activities and a great many trade stands. A number of play by mail companies and software houses are to attend.

Infocom

STARCROSS is the latest of the Infocom range of adventures to be published in the UK by Commodore for the CBM64. The *Zork* trilogy is already available.

The game is on disc, and, along with the other Infocom adventures from Commodore UK, costs £11.99.

Scorpio

SCORPIO SOFTWARE and MW Gamesworld have merged to form Scorpio Gamesworld Limited. The new company will be producing budget tapes at £1.99, and more serious software at £5.50. Among the games planned are *Codebook Caper*, a graphic adventure, and *Sniper*, an introductory wargame, both for the 48K Spectrum.

The new company will also be working on adaptations of boardgames published by a well known American company. Informed sources have suggested it could be Fantasy Games Unlimited.

FGU publish a wide range of role playing games, but the first to be coded is likely to be *Oregon Trail*, a solitaire role playing boardgame.

MUD on line from Century

MULTI USER DUNGEON, the play by modem interactive adventure game run on the University of Essex DEC 10 mainframe, is to go commercial next year.

Publishing house Century Communications has bought the rights to the game from the designers, Richard Bartle and Roy Trubshaw. Century now hopes to buy or rent a VAX computer on which to run the game.



Richard Bartle

At present, *MUD* can handle up to 30 players simultaneously, but only in the early hours of the morning or at weekends when memory is available. Century intends to have 100 players initially, but Richard Bartle says that the only limiting factor is the number of telephone lines installed. "There is no reason why you cannot have up to 1000 people playing at once," he claims.

Century was the only company to show any interest in MUD and, as a reward, has been turned into a character, Century the Wizard. Senior Editor Simon Dally plays every night.

Richard Bartle estimates that 800 or so people have played Mud in the four years it has been running. About 100 play it now, some 30 of them every night.

Century are understandably reluctant to commit themselves to any definite date, and will only say that *MUD* will be launched "sometime in 1985."

The Incredible Hulk



IF YOU were a green skinned monster trapped inside a computer, perpetually turned into a weakling human by nasty gases and persistently encountering an unhelpful Chief Examiner, what would you do? Answers on a postcard please to . . .

The Hulk is the latest offering from Adventure International, written in collaboration with Marvel Comics, who first spawned the not-so-jolly green giant. It follows the current trend for adventure of the book of the film of the record of the comic strip, which actually seems to be doing us poor adventurers a great deal of good as new talents, new plots and new money is being put into this masochistic hobby. So, you might expect the product of the design talents of Scott Adams and the graphics of Marvel to be something extra special in this line. If you do, then you will be rather disappointed.

I reviewed the Spectrum version. The graphics are definitely good, though the claim to be 'the best yet' might be contested by a few software houses. They are static illustrations in the style popularised by the Hobbit, with each scene getting its graphic. Some actions also have appropriate graphics. For example turning from the Hulk to Bruce Banner takes three pictures which you must step through by pressing <Enter>. This is attractive at first but becomes a bit of a pain after a while, because all you want to do is type in the next command. Most illustrations are pretty close to the comics' originals, and there are some nice touches. For example, 'Look Ring' gives you a close up picture of the ring (not that it does you any good!). Looking in the mirror shows your current image (either Hulk or Banner). You can turn off the graphics, if you want to.

The game is definitely difficult. Some might say it was too difficult. I would — I am stuck. However, I have never held this against any adventure (mind you my copy of Castle of Riddles has taken to cowering when I enter the room). I would say it is about standard Scott Adams, but I do have some gripes about the game. The main one is that this Spectrum version is one of the unfriendliest games I have played.

It often refuses to interpret a command you know it understands: 'look ring', you say. 'I don't understand LOok riNg' it replies. Perversely, when it feels annoyed by the way you keep bothering it, it turns your innocent commands into something totally different and pretends it does not know what is going on, presumably hoping you will give up and go away. Obviously either the keyboard reading routine is at fault or, more likely, the text compression is getting the bends on decompression. Maybe other copies will not have this fault, but it seems to me a serious flaw.

There is more. Output is pretty crude. The program opens with various credits, then does not even clear the screen before giving the first game message. No fifth form programmer would let a game go out like that. Screen scrolling is also untidy. Your task is to collect a number of gems (some of which seem to appear randomly) and 'store them into' the proper location, whatever that means. Worst of all, many messages appear in mixtures of upper and lower case and are written vertically on the screen rather than from left to right. Even some of the cheapest amateur games around format screen messages more attractively than this.

Another irritating point, though perhaps not a flaw, is the pure commercialism (and, dare I say it, Americanism) of the program. The flashing cursor pointlessly includes the letters AI (not Artificial Intelligence but Adventure International) making a distracting, headache inducing feature. The manual says HELP may give you assistance. It may, but it has not given me any; instead it gives an advertising message for the *Scott Adams Hint Book*. No free help sheets for the brain-warped adventurer here but more on the lines of Melbourne House again — write a game too difficult to solve then charge more for the solution — and use the program to advertise it. Even sillier is the fact that every time the words The Incredible Hulk appear a little (TM) follows them. This does not look much like the 'wondrous electronic world' promised in the blurb. And I will not mention the American expression (after all 'Hit Enter' might be appropriate to the Hulk) and spelling (but why cannot a game for a predominantly British machine use British English?)

If you are looking for sophisticated artificial intelligence, or complex text handling, or interactive characters you will find none of that in *The Hulk (TM)*. What you will find is the classic two word input plus a few single key commands — L for Look, I for Inventory, and initial letters for directions and some special commands which depend on your machine. In fact the only real novelty in the game itself (as opposed to its graphics) is the type of puzzle and problem you have to solve. Whilst the claim that you do not need to know Marvel comics to play is true to some extent (just as *The Hobbit* can be solved by guesswork, trial and error and some common sense), you are not going to get far if you do not know anything at all about the relationship between Banner and Hulk. In fact the settings and problems are very much in tune with the comic book ethos, and are likely to delight everyone out there with fingers blackened from cheap ink. This, of course, contributes to the difficulty of the game.

SHARP EYED observers will already know that Scott Adams himself appears in *The Hulk* comic — the Chief Examiner is based on him. He will also feature in *Spiderman*, the second in the *Questprobe* series of games, based on the characters created by Marvel comics.

Scott sees the Marvel Universe as prime material for adventure games. "Most people," he says, "would like a chance to be their favourite comic character."

Twelve titles are planned; in addition to the Hulk and Spiderman, Doctor Strange, the Fantastic Four, and at least one of the X-men are likely to star.

The Hulk was deliberately designed as a beginning adventure, and Scott believes that it will attract a lot of new players; in order to widen the appeal, however, he has had to simplify the problems, so that, he admits, "anybody who has played a lot will finish the game in a day."





There are other good features, and some that are debateable. One of these is *Questprobe*, a comic cum magazine devoted to this series of adventures. Ah, you had not guessed that this was the first of a series? There are to be twelve comics, and twelve games, over the next four years, each featuring a Marvel hero but all linked in plot. If they improve as they go along, this will be a good feature. If they remain the same as *The Hulk* they will be dismal in four years, and I doubt if the series will be completed.

The first issue of *Questprobe* is no different from your standard Marvel comic, including the puzzling story. I suspect that there are clues to the game within it, but I have not found any yet. Despite all I have said, the combination of game and comic seems an attractive package, especially if they can be tied together rather more convincingly than the first time around.

Chart buster

ADVENTURE INTERNATIONAL'S latest release, *The Hulk*, is doing well in the ratings — but Mike Woodruffe, AI UK's managing director, has a low opinion of the charts themselves.

"Wholesalers have a duty to stock a complete range if they publish a chart — or to qualify the chart by saying what games they don't have figures for."

He has also had problems with wholesalers over the *Questprobe* comic. Many have no provisions for distribution of such an item, and so have not been able to supply retailers with it.

"Next time, we're going to reduce the size of the comic, so we can package it with the game. The price will stay the same, so effectively you'll get the comic free."

In the long term, he sees the market turning increasingly towards play by modem adventures. He also looks forward to the development of links between micros and laser disc players. He believes that, "As cable develops, software houses will have a main computer which users can download programs from. They'll pay for time used."

Mike does not intend to let AI UK stand still — "we will be going for cable games." He admits, however, that his ultimate dream, the holographic adventure, is still a long way off.

On balance then, this is a goodish adventure, well packaged but badly presented on screen. Too much time has been given to the graphics and to commercial enterprise, and too little to considering the user. Nevertheless, many copies will be sold and lots of money will change hands because of the names behind the game. If you are keen on comics or want a game with some of the best graphics around, you can probably put up with the irksome features of *The Hulk*, but I hope at least some of you will avoid it and encourage a better program next time.

Noel Williams

The SAGA continues . . .

The Sorcerer of Claymorgue Castle is a forthcoming adventure from the venerable Scott Adams, and the thirteenth in the SAGA series — an acronym for 'Scott Adams Graphic Adventure'. It is yet to be released in this country, so this review is based on a pre-release Apple II version. The game is to be converted for a wide range of popular micros in Britain.

It covers both sides of a disc, taking some 250K in total, and loads in several parts. There is also a 'letter' from Scott Adams, graphically persuading the user not to lend it to anyone to copy, or to use a pirated version. The graphics in the letter prepare you for the quality of those in the game — fantastic.

After the game loads, you are asked if you have a Voice unit attached to your Apple — it is not known if there will be speech options for any of the translations in this country. After this, the game itself begins. You start in a field, and the screen displays a beautiful picture of the Castle, surrounded by a moat. Regrettably, my Apple does not have any colour output but the graphics still looked superb. The lack of colour is not a great drawback, as different patterns are used to give varying shades (like the use of stipples on the QL). The Apple hi-res screen takes some 8K of memory, and as there are over 30 different pictures, this translates to in excess of 240K just for graphics. However, the pictures cannot be stored as straight bytes, as there is not enough room on a disc for them. Some form of compression must be used, but I don't know how — anyway, who cares? It works beautifully, though how it's going to be done on disc-less machines I'm not sure.

So much for the technicalities — what of the game? As no instructions at all were supplied, I'm not sure of the background story. The player is the Sorcerer in the title, and for an unspecified reason twelve magical stars lying in and around the castle must be collected, and placed somewhere. As you are a Sorcerer, you can use the many Spells lying around the castle, as well as the weird and wonderful objects, to solve the puzzles and problems that block your progress.

The first problem is really how to get into the Castle, and the most obvious way, by lowering the drawbridge, does indeed work. However, it is not really the 'proper' way to enter the Castle, as you use up an important spell — the proper way is very complicated and not at all likely.

This is a graphic adventure, and instead of the pictures simply enhancing the game, they often provide important clues to playing the game. They also change if, say, a door opens, though objects lying around are not shown pictorially. On requesting an Inventory, you don't just get a list, but a complete picture of you tipping out the contents of your bag, with each object and star shown in high-resolution.

There are supposed to be over 50 locations, and in my wanderings I found about three quarters of them, each with its own full screen picture. Of the twelve stars, I found half of them, and this was after many phone calls to AI, who were extremely helpful. They said that they took a week to solve _Claymorgue Castle_, with the aid of not only a hints book, but also the source listing of the program! This one will take much longer to solve for the average, and even the above-average adventurer, as it is very complex, despite the relatively low number of locations.



After the praise — now the gripes. Commands are not up to _Hobbit_ standard, accepting only two words, and the HELP command is included for completeness only — on only one occasion did it print anything but 'Sorry, I can't right now', which was very infuriating. The Spells have clues to their uses in their names, which sent me scurrying to my dictionary for some of them — do you know what Lycanthrope means? One spell is called 'Dizzy Dean', which will mean nothing to you unless you are an American Baseball fan, apparently. When you die, which can be very frequent, you are given a score reflecting only how many stars you have stored somewhere, which in my case was always 0 out of 100. A fairer way would be to give a percentage based on how many rooms you have visited.

This is the 13th SAGA, but the first I have played — I am now going to try and find what I have been missing by starting from number one! At the moment the only versions are for the Apple and Atari machines, but by the launch date it should be on the Spectrum, Dragon, Co-Co, CBM 64 and the Beeb at £9.95 on tape. It has excellent graphics, though how well they will convert for disc-less machines I don't know.

Andy Pennel



SHERLOCK HOLMES Be the world's greatest sleuth — in the most advanced and challenging adventure game ever.

For the first time ever, an adventure game in which you can argue with intelligent characters.

Study the clues, question the suspects, make the deductions — and match your wits against the most dastardly criminals in history.

MUGSY gives a totally new direction for thrill seekers — comic animation in text, stunning graphics and a full arcade game! Mugsy is your one and only chance to become the greatest gang leader with definite ill-repute.

'Da best graphics.'
POPULAR COMPUTING WEEKLY

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Discover Crasimoff's World

***Martin Croft** leads a party of adventurers through Crasimoff's World and Earthwood*

WEARILY, Gorbuduc drew rein and surveyed the tattered remnants of his party. Since accidentally trespassing on ground sacred to the swamp folk, scarce two days gone, their path had been dogged by scaly green skinned avengers, bent on washing their temple clean with red human blood. Only six of his followers remained, two wounded.

Now, having finally escaped their pursuers, they faced another peril — a strangely quite town, the gates ajar.

"I like it not — it smells of evil," growled Borax the Mage. "Draw weapons," ordered Gorbuduc; "we go in. Mages and priests in the centre — and prepare your spells."

If you are wondering what on earth is happening here, the answer is nothing — nothing on earth, that is.

Our hero, Gorbuduc, here seen about to flex his thews, his vocal cords, and what little remains of his intelligence, is a native of *Crasimoff's World,* a Play by Mail game run by KJC Games of Cleveleys, within bowshot of the Blackpool illuminations. To learn more, read on . . .

As a new player in *Crasimoff's World,* you start off with 10 characters. You can pick from fighter, mage, or priest — each has its own advantages and disadvantages. You must name your party, and define standard reactions to various situations.

Every round, which can be as often as twice a week, if you feel energetic, you receive two 'round sheets.' The first round sheet is the one you used to write your last turn's orders on. This will have games master comments on it, and an up-dated map. The other is blank, and is for you to use to say what your party will be doing next turn.

You will start in a town; you may want to try and recruit extra party members, or buy useful items, before leaving.

You also have to specify what spells you will be using, and give provisional orders for the various situations you may find yourself in.



Your mages and priests start off with a limited selection of spells, and can pick up more as your party explores the landscape. Your fighters start off with basic armour and weapons, but as you gain Oraks (the monetary unit of the world), you can buy new equipment.

Each party member has an attack level and a defence level. Fifty points are needed to increase a level in either ability, and the various types of character receive differing numbers of points for each round. The Chieftain — the party leader — gets enough to go up a level a turn automatically. Fighters will usually go up every second turn, while Mages and Priests, who have to use their points to power their spells as well, can take far longer.



KJC Games' Kevin Cropper

Wandering about the countryside, you can meet all sorts of odd people. There are the Astoffs, the original rulers of the planet. In the various swamps dotted around live the scaly green swamp-people, who can be either friendly or hostile — usually depending on what the last party they met did to them! Dwarves are rumoured to be sailing around the coasts. And, of course, there are the other players.

The most powerful party in the game at the moment is Silver Fern; significantly, the player running Silver Fern is also the High King Lord in Mitre Games' *Tribes of Crane.* Sigurd's Sword Brothers, ranked third in KJC's top ten chart, is run by *Tribes of Crane's* games master.

Starting parties have around 80 levels of attack and defence distributed amongst their characters; Silver Fern has 587 levels, the second ranked Paladins of the Fulcrum have 537, and Sigurd's Sword Brothers have 536. You have to realise, though, that they have been playing for 74, 60, and 61 rounds respectively.

Some players run more than one party, which is one way of starting a strong alliance. This can give them an edge — but they are also cheating themselves of the real challenge of the game. One player runs six parties — and sends in orders for each one once a week. At £1.25 a turn per party, it must mount up pretty quickly.

Kevin Cropper combines running KJC Games with managing Stationery and Games in downtown Cleveleys. He was responsible for the original design of *Crasimoff's World,* and was its first games master — it is entirely human moderated.

Nigel Mitchell is the senior of the two full time, salaried staff who now administer the game. After getting a degree in Engineering from Bristol, he had the choice of working for London Transport, or moving from Sussex to Cleveleys to take over the running of a planet.

Nigel believes that the personal touch attracts a lot of people. "We try to process orders as soon as we get them — turn around is usually a couple of days."

Human moderation also means that players have much wider scope for their imagination. But sometimes this can get out of hand.

"We allowed one player to develop a teleport spell," says Nigel. "Everything was fine, until he sold it to somebody else, who promptly teleported the entire male population of a town one mile into the air. We've had to limit the power of that spell a bit since then."

Nigel splits the running of the campaign with the other full time games master, Andy Smith, who gave up a job in a bank to work for KJC. In addition, a part-timer comes in to deal with game starts. Even with two and a half people working on the game, paperwork is piling up so much that Kevin has decided to recruit another full timer.

He feels that expansion is necessary: "We want to keep up the quality and speed of response, and we can only do that by using full time people."

The games masters are kept busy processing orders from the 450 players that the game has attracted over the last few years.

"We first advertised *Crasimoff's World* in August 1980, and we had about 30 enquiries. Ten of those are still active," says Kevin.

"We began 1984 with just 250 players, and the number has been increasing phenomenally. Seventy of our 450 players joined in the last two months." ▶

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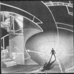
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◀ *Crasimoff's World* has become the first British designed game to be sold to America. Adventures By Mail, the third largest PBM company in the States, will be running the game for US players from August 1. They will be starting off with more than 200 participants.

ABM will have to print a new rule book for the States. They will also have to design a new version of the map. The US map will probably be far larger than the British map, as there is a greater pool of potential players in America. Many US games number players in the thousands rather than the hundreds.

Up till now, *Crasimoff's World* has been the only game run by KJC: but from September 1, they will also be offering an American import — *Earthwood*.

Developed by Game Systems Incorported, based in Miami, Florida, *Earthwood* is a multi-player game requiring strategic and economic decisions. The objective for each of the 25 players is to control all the developed cities of the world, whether individually, or as one member of an alliance. There are over 2,000 players in the States, and GSI have processed over 40,000 turns.

Unlike *Crasimoff's World, Earthwood* is entirely computer moderated. KJC has had to buy an upgraded Apple 2+ with 80 column card to run the specially designed programs that GSI provided. Altogether, the package required to start the game has set Kevin back over £3,000.

"We don't foresee too many problems," claims Nigel. "Our wealth of experience with *Crasimoff* should stand us in good stead."

Most players in *Earthwood* control kingdoms, but some will be playing individual characters with their own peculiar powers — the Wizard and the Necromancer, to name but two.

"Earthwood," players are told in the front of the rule book, "is an ancient world." In ages long past, the inhabitants turned away from the Gods, and embraced science. As so often seems to happen when this sort of thing occurs, the ultimate weapon was used, and the world sank back into barbarism, each race becoming isolated from the rest.

Only now, nearly 3,000 years after the cataclysm, are the separate groups (at least 25 of them) beginning to come into contact again.

The various cities dotted about the square gridded map (as opposed to *Crasimoff's* hexagon grid) can contain production centres for gold, food, or armour.

A player's followers can be divided into a maximum of three groups, which can then be moved around the map, searching for the locations of the other cities of *Earthwood*, or for lost artefacts of great



Gamesmaster Nigel Mitchell hard at work on MAD's second turn-sheet

power which may — or may not — be waiting for someone to pick them up.

There are a number of strange creatures which can be met, and which might allow themselves to be recruited. These include werewolves, fairies, dragons, goblins, centaurs, giant spiders, trolls, and wild-men.

Each character has a constitution score, which basically represents the fighting value and the amount of damage that can be taken. City walls also have a constitution factor, which must be overcome before an attacker can get at the defending force within.

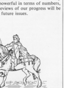
If a player believes that he, or his allies, controls all the developed cities of *Earthwood*, then he has the right to call for a count. The computer will check all the cities on the map, and will ask the other players still active if they acknowledge allegiance. If there is even one city left which the player or alliance does not control, or if one of the supposed allies denies his support, then the game continues.

Obviously, then, if a player asks for a count and does not achieve victory, it means that he must either search for the hidden city or cities still holding out, or he must check the loyalty of the rest of the alliance.

Like any game wholly moderated by a micro computer, the system has its plus and minus points. For example, if you attack a city, and win, your troops will enter that city: but you won't know if there are enough stocks of food within to feed your men. If there aren't, they revolt. So you have to be very careful indeed, and calculate everything to the last detail.

KJC will be running *Earthwood* from September 1; the launch coincides with Games Day, at the Royal Horticultural Society's New Hall, in London.

• If you are playing in *Crasimoff's World* already, then be warned! There is a party of *MAD*-men (and women — we're not sexist) wandering about the continent. We may not be very powerful in terms of numbers, but regular reviews of our progress will be appearing in future issues.





KJC Games' address is 5 Vicarage Avenue, Cleveleys, Blackpool, Lancashire, FY5 2BD

Sphinx Adventure: Riddle of the Sands

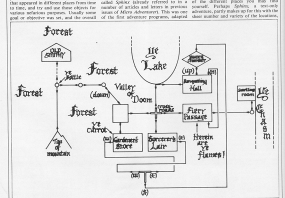
*Intrepid explorers **Robin** and **Jean Burgess** tackle the ancient mysteries of Acornsoft's Sphinx Adventure, and show you how to get started*

THE FIRST "Adventure Games" were constructed on main-frame computers by programmers who wanted some recreational diversion that would test their "lateral thinking" and creative ability. These first examples were quite innovative (even if they had not-very-original names such as *Adventure* — which is the probable derivation of the generic name). They were a type of computer-simulation experience where the player was put into an imaginary situation, described by the computer-program, such that he or she had to make decisions about what to do in that situation. You could proceed to another location, if a means of exit were found from the first location, or investigate where you were currently situated, pick up objects that appeared in different places from time to time, and try and use those objects for various nefarious purposes. Usually some goal or objective was set, and the overall aim of the game was to fulfil that objective, though having an interesting 'journey' while doing so.

The second generation of such games coincided with the advent of the microcomputer that home-user and school could actually own for themselves. After the initial spate of the arcade-type "bang-bang" game, which is still very popular now for the home-user, if not in schools, the "adventure-game" began to be produced for the microcomputer. These, at first, followed the initial models built by the "main-line" programmers. At last games for those micro owners who wanted to "think" were available.

A couple of years ago, Acornsoft brought out for the BBC 'B' a program called *Sphinx* (already referred to in a number of articles and letters in previous issues of *Micro Adventurer*). This was one of the first adventure programs, adapted from the original versions, still with some of the same features. Three of the characters from the originals have made the transition. First, there is a belligerent dwarf who appears every now and again in order to frustrate your efforts at exploration. He does this by throwing axes at you at every opportunity. Woe betide you if you do not deal with him quickly enough! Then there is a bearded pirate who will simply steal a "treasure" from you if you meet him, before chortling off, as pirates do, into the distance! And of course there is the obligatory troll to whom you must give one of your "treasures" before you are able to pass him.

Later adventure-games have included pictures as part of the description for some of the different places you may find yourself. Perhaps *Sphinx*, a text-only adventure, partly makes up for this with the sheer number and variety of the locations,



together with the different types of problem which you have to solve in order to reach your goal. (It is probably quite likely that an adventure published today lacking both sound and pictures, and having only monochrome text, would not sell nearly as well as *Sphinx* has done.) Programmed in BASIC, the author has filled just under 25K of the BBC's memory and so, to add pictures, clearly some of the 150 locations would have to be dispensed with. This would possibly result in a certain loss of complexity.

The object of the game is to find the Sphinx itself, and lay at its feet as much treasure as you can discover. Certain objects are not obviously valuable, such as the carrot, but of course the maximum possible score of 800 cannot be achieved without having all the objects the Sphinx considers of value. Needless to say the location of the Sphinx remains hidden until the majority of the rest of the game has been solved. The surmise that the Sphinx will be found in a desert turns out to be correct, but that doesn't help a great deal as the desert turns out to be a complex maze of no less than 20 apparently-identical locations.

Arguably the author has cheated a bit with his locations as the game contains not one maze but three different mazes, though the other two are both smaller than the desert. (This does not necessarily mean that they are simpler!) It also comes as a pleasant revelation to realise suddenly that there are *two* Red Rooms. It is a fairly common feature that a 'blockage', making your way impassable in some particular place, has as its solution the bringing of an object that is to be found a long way away. Obviously you need a boat to cross the Lake, but can you find it nearby? Not a chance. Another example is the elephant found blocking the way in the Maharajah's Palace. Miles away from here a certain tiny grey furry creature scampers around but, of course, you cannot catch him without finding some suitable bait. Where else to find this but near the Gnomes' Kitchen, which in turn is far distant from the said cuddly creature?



A clue at the beginning of the game suggesting the use of magic is not to be disregarded, though it is persistence rather than magic that is called for in dealing with the ubiquitious dwarf! Fairly early on, too, the Magician's wand is a vital asset. Without it you will not progress very far at all. Another interesting touch, also taken from the original main-frame versions, are the friendly creatures that latch onto you and follow you around. Unfortunately they can be quite hard to shake off!

Eventually you discover how to make bridges (it is certainly a very economical



method!) and when it is safe to cross them. You can probably work out how to pass the crocodile in the Everglades fairly quickly, but how do you pass it a second time? There are some interesting-sounding locations such as the faded Yellow Brick Road, the Fairy Grotto, The Alchemist's Laboratory and certain "obligatory" places, such as the Quicksand, the Dragon's Lair and the Hall of the Mountain King. There are a large number of objects, and each one is needed for something. Either it is one of the treasures you are seeking, or it is necessary in order to overcome some obstacle, or to solve some kind of puzzle (or in one or two cases, it is for both of these).

There is a limit, since you are human, to the number of objects you can carry. As some of the items you can find don't seem to be useful for ages and ages you might be tempted to drop certain things, or not even bother to pick them up in the first place. You might well despair of ever finding a use for the keys, for example, which you find very quickly, and which sound as though they ought to be useful. Hang on to them though and one day, perhaps two weeks after you start this game, you will find the lock they open!

There is also a Secret Word (which shall here remain unuttered!) that does amazing things in certain places. Furthermore any treasure that the Bearded Pirate, unpleasant fellow, snatches from you, plus the treasure you give the Troll at the, wait for it, "Troll Toll Bridge" *can* be recovered! Another feature of the "creature-encounters", such as your meetings with the Ogre, the Orc and the Dragon, not to mention the Goblins, is that you must dispatch them in exactly the right way. If you try the wrong method, or do nothing, you may well come to a sticky end!



Perhaps a suggestion as to how to tackle the dreaded maze (or indeed, any maze) would be in order before looking at one or two of the locations in greater detail. Firstly, if you reach locations that seem to be very similar check initially if the locations are indeed *exactly* the same. For example, there are six occurrences of "You are at a cross in the tunnels". That part of the description is identical. However you will find that the exits from these locations vary from one place to the next. Obviously a careful map needs to be drawn as you proceed. (Incidentally as the tunnels twist and turn, going north from one place does not necessarily mean you can go south to return to the same place.) One of the main-frame versions contained "a maze of twisty passages", "a twisty maze of passages", "a twisting maze of passages" etc. so careful observation would note that these places were not in fact absolutely identical.

What should you do when locations ▶

◀ are *exactly* the same, (including exits,) such as in the desert? What is needed is some way of making each location unique, so that if you return to a place you have been before, you will know without question that you *have* returned. Here is another use for all the objects, including the apparently useless ones that you are carrying around. If you put a unique object in a place that is otherwise indistinguishable from a second place, that makes the first place unique and thus different from the second. If you make a careful map, (assuming you have the patience to do all this) while you are gaily abandoning your hard-won objets d'art, theoretically you can then number individually each apparently-identical location. There are two problems with this: firstly, finding and picking up all the objects again, and secondly hoping that no-one (like the pirate) has come along in your absence and removed some of your treasures! This second point is a definite snag to the whole method, of course, but fortunately does not occur in *Sphinx*.

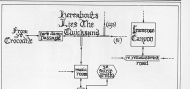
Having ourselves spent several evenings over a couple of weeks before eventually reaching the magic score of 800, we take pity upon the nervous adventurer just setting out. What follows is therefore an introduction to the very first part of *Sphinx*, in order that you may progress at least a certain distance, together with a map of this first section of the game.

You begin on the top of a mountain. You quickly learn the penalty of going anywhere except North along the road: your only reward is getting lost in the forest! (If you should get lost, just persevere in trying to find your way out.) Now, should you pick up the bottle? It might be booby-trapped!

Following the path East where you find the bottle brings you to the brink of the Valley of Doom. It would be most unwise to go down into this without a source of light. (When we tried this the first time I didn't want to go down at all, but my wife bullied me into it!) Fortunately there is a lamp, together with the set of keys already mentioned, free for the taking inside the Old Smithy. Where is that exactly? We leave you to find it.

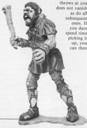
So with trepidation, you go down into the Valley of Doom (making sure you light your lamp). If you now go East you reach some crossroads (not the motel). Here you encounter the infamous bearded pirate. Now, as we have said, the pirate is partial to treasure (as pirates are) and he seems to regard your bottle as such. This might not seem to matter but when you go North to the Lake, you can no longer collect any water — very useful for quenching things! How do you stop the pirate from stealing your bottle, then? You could try leaving the bottle before you reach the crossroads then going to attack him with your bare hands. (We're not sure if this works because we eventually managed to by-pass him.)

Once you have reached the Lake (and doesn't the far shore beckon?) you can go East to the Banqueting Hall, where of course you pick up the food which just



happens to be lying there — and of course you *don't* eat it yourself!: someone or something else might want it! Up from the Banqueting Hall leads you to the Sword Chamber — aha! Now, if you can find another way round to this sword, perhaps that is what you can use against the pirate. So try South from the Hall of Spirits instead of East. This leads to the Gardener's Store (yes, *do* pick up the carrot), and, via a T-junction where you must carefully map your directions, you can reach either the Sorcerer's Lair (and the valuable Wand) or the elusive Sword Chamber.

Eventually you reach the Fiery Passage where the flames drive you back if you try to go East. So dare you throw the water, which will presumably mean losing it? You still have to elude the Pirate if you wish to go back for some more water. We always felt it would be good to have a *full* bottle of water with us if at all possible. (After all, you might get very thirsty if you ever manage to find the desert!) Perhaps a digression is necessary at this point before you go through the Fiery Passage. Just possibly you have met the dwarfish adversary by this time. The first axe he throws at you does not vanish as do all subsequent ones. If you dare spend time picking it up, you can then throw it back at him! (This is not always 100% reliable, unfortunately!) You must also remember to retrieve your weapon(s) for another such occasion! — an alternative might be to try your sword.



And the Fiery Passage? Let us hope you have made it through safely. Facing you is a wide chasm. North here will take you to some silver, which is very nice, but it will not help you cross the chasm. We will leave you to puzzle out how you might achieve this objective, merely reminding you of the clue at the beginning of your travels about Magic.

In addition to the above, we include too a partial map of what is usually the next part of an adventurer's journey, where you come across the Crocodile, the faded Yellow Brick Road and the Fairy Grotto, though not necessarily in that order.

As final comments, we feel that *Sphinx* is a game that provides considerable challenge in the various problems it sets, enabling you to pretend that you are really thinking "laterally" at times! We felt that the smaller mazes were quite interesting to plough away at, because they were slightly different at most of the locations, whereas the desert seemed to be complication for complication's sake, and therefore much less interesting. We thought it was a definite drawback to have no colour, pictures, or sound; a SAVE routine would also have been helpful. A rather weak comment when at last we had reached the 800 points accorded to the complete solution was quite an anti-climax too, especially after having spent so much time in the attaining thereof.

Balanced against these negative comments, perhaps we should bear in mind that the game *was* one of the first for the BBC, that it does seem to be bug-free and devoid of spelling mistakes, and above all, people are still buying it!

Adventure	: *Sphinx Adventure*
Micro	: *BBC B*
Price	: *£9.95*
Format	: *Cassette*
Supplier	: *Acornsoft, 4a Market Hill, Cambridge*

The land of Ket

Tom Frost travels through time on the trail of Vran Verusbel and Delphia — leader and priestess of a cult of mad monks

MOUNTAINS OF KET, Temple of Vran and a third adventure, entitled *The Final Mission*, comprise *The Ket Trilogy*, for which there is the incentive of £400 worth of video equipment. This prize is for the first adventurer to identify a message, a short part of which is revealed only on successful completion of each adventure.

Prizes for computer games are not new, but this time it would appear that the identification of a winner is a decided possibility. The ridiculously high rewards offered by *Pimania* and *Krakit* are protected by equally ridiculous and, to date, impossible to solve puzzles. The *Ket Trilogy* offers a more modest prize and, on the evidence of the first two adventures, a hope of eventual success. *Mountains of Ket* opens the trilogy as a modest challenge with several interesting features, followed by the more difficult *Temple of Vran*. It is to be expected that the final adventure will continue this progression but remain within the bounds of possibility.

In the trilogy you assume the role of a wrongly-convicted murderer, offered a reprieve in return for the destruction of Vran Verusbel and Delphia, the leader and priestess of a cult of mad monks who are terrorising the Land of Ket. In order to



ensure your loyalty, a magic assassin bug accompanies you and also provides details of anything you may encounter.

Before you set out you are informed of the value of some vital attributes under the categories of Prowess, Strength and Luck. In any fight these attributes are compared with those of your opponent, over a series of rounds, in order to determine the victor. This combat feature injects a flavour of *Dungeons and Dragons* into basically standard two word input text adventures, and enhances the atmosphere of hidden danger.

With a sword in your possession, and this combat routine to be used, it is tempting to kill in order to obtain possession of vital objects. However, such indiscriminate use of your prowess is to be discouraged, unless there is no alternative.

Riding along

In part one, the objective is to find your way to, and finally through, the mountains. The action begins on a road leading into a small village. You are informed that the mountains are a short horse-ride to the east. From this information, it is logical to assume that you will never reach the mountains without a horse. A short stroll around the village soon identifies the presence of a stable where the stableman demands four coins for the purchase of a horse. But you have only two coins! An increase in your wealth can be obtained by considering the shopkeeper as a friendly trader and providing the cartographer with the means to fight off the cold. A nice gentle start to the task, but the response to SCORE indicates that this initial success has barely scratched the surface.

A short horse-ride does take you to the mountains and, once inside, the action gets more furious with many obstacles to overcome. In certain instances here, the sequence of commands is quite precise and in particular the problem of the hungry dog is inexorably tied to further progress.

The puzzles to be solved in the mountain caves are often inter-related, with some objects having a dual purpose. The empty bottle, for instance, can be filled with oil and magic elixir but what to do with either? Both have a purpose and the "spring in your step" after drinking the elixir wears off after a short time, making the choice of location for imbibing one plateau which must be scaled very precisely.

Bribery and gambling are both encountered and, although the former is quite newsworthy, the latter really is a gamble, so that before entering into the dice game it is wise to exercise the SAVE option.

Delphia eventually proves to be a rather tame opponent, disappearing in a cloud of green smoke, only to re-appear in *Temple of Vran*.

The exit from the mountains is eventually discovered by dressing up as a wizard and solving the final HELP clue that wizards are totally magical. The two word totally is the clue here for an action foreign to all under-ground adventurers.

Mountains of Ket is an enjoyable, not too difficult adventure, which should certainly encourage successful adventurers to move on to *Temple of Vran*. This can be played independently of *Mountains of Ket* but it is possible to carry forward your attributes if you so wish. Now on the other side of the mountains, your objective is to seek out and kill the occupants of the castle. The format is substantially similar to the first part, and again it is important to preserve your vital strength and luck points.



Incentive's Steve Benfiels and Richard McCormack

Initial exploration reveals a large number of locations and strange objects with interesting possibilities. For instance, will the mouse waken the sleeping kitten or perhaps frighten the elephant into motion? Will the trampoline enable you to jump on to the elephant or up to a hole high in a wall? The kitten and mouse both ignore the offer of food but the elephant will follow you to the cliff top to get it.

As with *Mountains of Ket*, several items perform a dual purpose but after only a few false starts you should be swinging across a quicksand pit to meet the delightful

Aphrodite. The reward of a key for the castle is offered for successful completion of tasks in two different time zones to which she sends you. The first is 1940 where you are subjected to exploding bombs and to the indignity of wearing a moustache



(are all adventurers male?).

The second time zone is 2300 and, as with 1940, this should pose no serious problems as success is obtained by simply picking up, using, or wearing all of the easily found objects. However, it is imperative to return to the present time zone with any other objects for which there was no apparent use.

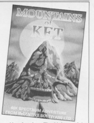
Rewarded with the key it only remains to find the castle. You know where it is and can see it across a stream of lava, but how to reach it? Once across the lava (no clues for how) you will discover one vital puzzle thrown at you. Final success depends on having eight objects with you but you can carry only seven and cannot re-cross the lava. Nice one.

A question of logic

As with most good adventures the solutions to all the puzzles are maddeningly logical when they are finally discovered, although the two time zone sections of *Temple of Vran* are not of the high standard of the rest of the adventures.

Two minor criticisms are perhaps worthy of mention. The noun vocabulary could be more extensive — it does not even recognise the existence of your travelling companion, Edgar, and on a few occasions the response to an input (always a fatal one) is only fleetingly displayed on screen.

Due to the prize on offer no HELP sheet is available yet from Incentive Software, but a careful re-read of this article may



provide a few clues. The third part of the trilogy is due to appear in Autumn 1984. All those with the first two parts of the apparently meaningless message should be eager to explore *The Final Mission*. □

Adventure	: *The Ket Trilogy*
Micro	: *Spectrum 48K*
Format	: *Cassette*
Price	: *£5.50 each*
Supplier	: *Incentive Software*

The Tribes of Crane



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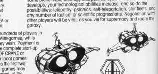
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These are play-by-mail games: hundreds of players in the same game send in turns to Mitregames, while negotiating with each other as they wish. Payment is according to turns played. The complete start-up package for either THE TRIBES OF CRANE or STARMASTER is available in your local games shop, price £9.95, which includes the first two turns of play. In case of difficulty, games may be ordered post free from Mitregames, at the address below, enclosing cheque/postal order for the games you require.

Trade enquiries to: Games Workshop, 27/29 Sunbeam Road, London, NW10 6PJ
U.S. enquiries to: Games Workshop, 9110 F, Red Branch Road, Columbia, MD 21045, USA



MITREGAMES

77 Burntwood Grange
Wandsworth Common, London SW18

ADVENTURE HELP



If you need advice or have some to offer write to Tony Bridge, Adventure Help, Micro Adventurer, 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2R 3LD

STUART LORIMER writes from Aberdeen about Incentive's program, *Mountains of Ket*. This is an interesting adventure, and is the first part of a trilogy, with a prize waiting at the end for the lucky winner. There is a lot of monster-bashing in this one, and the screen layouts are better than average.

Stuart's questions are typical of the problems met by the people stuck in the adventure.

"I have noticed that some objects, such as the Dice, cannot be TAKEn. Is this a bug? Apart from this, I have other problems in the main adventure. I have entered the mountain, got through the "Mint with the Hole" and even swum the River and met the Ogre. What now? Is there some way of passing the Skull, the Ogre, and the Shut Door at the top of the ramp? If so, please tell me before I shove my head through the telly screen!"

Unfortunately, Stuart, I have not seen *Ket* (although the screen layout and method of play is much the same as the second part of the trilogy, *Temple of Vran*), so I cannot help you — but, rest easy, Help is at hand. Tom Frost has written an article for *Micro Adventurer* about *Ket* and *Vran*, and his experiences with the program, as well as a move-by-move solution and maps. It appears in this issue, but you might like to write to him (enclosing an SAE, of course, and bearing in mind that, as there is a valuable prize waiting for the first successful player, Mr Frost will give you maybe 99% of the solution!). His address is The Links, Montrose, Angus.

While you're at it, ask him about his own, very reasonably-priced adventure, *Magic Treasure*, which I'm sure he would like to tell you about!

Kelvin Lodge has managed to score 1076 out of a possible 1100 points in *Colossal Adventure* and wants to know where the extra points are going to come from. First of all, Kelvin, smashing the Mirror is not necessary — the shadowy figure that waves back at you in another location is your reflection in this mirror! To get your treasures back from the Troll, try throwing something beastly at him.

As for *Snowball* — yes, I know that it can often be frustrating. It's a complex adventure, however, and clues are difficult to give. From the coffin at the start, go Up and then North and then into the passage and head East. You could try saying "Sesame" occasionally! The Nightingales will only enter blue mortuaries on the white level. I can't be of much more help without knowing details of the problems, but there are various bits of apparatus to assemble, in a quite logical way, and a very important code to crack.

On, quickly, to Hewson's adventure, *Quest*. Stuart Millinship and Andy Creamer are among several people who have written asking for help in this brilliant game. Stuart is stuck in the two mazes of *Quest*, and has trouble at the door of Castle Oops, while Andy has scored but 86 out of the possible 600.

Referring to the list of words, Stuart, from the starting location, go: 3-1-3-3 which will bring you to the burrow. From the maze entrance, go 2-4-2-2, and to return, 2-2. To gain entrance to the Castle, look in June's issue of *MAD*, where all should be revealed. My thanks to those intrepid Adventurers, Alan and Daphne Davis for the help in Quest.

1 WEST; 2 SOUTH;
3 NORTH; 4 EAST;

ADVENTURE CONTACT

MICRO CBM64 **Adventure** The Hulk **Problem** What do I do with the gas outlet, and how do I kill the ants? **Name** Sean Mackey **Address** 51 Hayman Avenue, Leigh, Gt. Manchester WN7 3UF.

MICRO CBM64 **Adventure** Zork III **Problem** How do I get past the sailor in the Viking ship? **Name** Shawn Crisp **Address** 90 Barvelle Close, St Nobert Road, London SE4.

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Quest **Problem** I have the long key, and just about everything else, but can't get into the castle. **Name** Mick Ruddy **Address** 12 The Avenue, Linthorpe, Middlesborough, Cleveland.

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Colditz **Problem** How do I dig under the outer fence, cross the roof, and get past the watch-tower? **Name** Timothy Gibbens **Address** 7 Buckstone Drive, Edinburgh EH10 6PH.

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Quest for the Holy Grail **Problem** Where is the vegetable to get past the Knights of Ni? **Name** Darren Cooper **Address** 21 Yorke Way, Ely, Cambs., CB6 3DT.

MICRO CBM 64 **Adventure** Starcross **Problem** How to get into the drive bubble? **Name** Nigel Morse **Address** 11 Green Leafe Avenue, Wheatley Hills, Doncaster, DN2 5RG.

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Knight's Quest **Problem** How to get past the Giant! **Name** Martin McGuinness **Address** 3 Harwell Close, West Ruislip, Middlesex.

MICRO Dragon 32 **Adventure** Franklin's Tomb **Problem** How to give the carrots to the rabbit, and the fly to the spider? **Name** Lee Booth **Address** 1 Ellastone Avenue, Bestwood, Park Estate, Nottingham, NG5 5RN.

MICRO BBC B **Adventure** Colossal Adventure **Problem** How to open the clam? Where is the Pirate's chest? What use is the beanstalk? **Name** Darren Richardson **Address** 6 Cedarhurst Rise, Newtownbreda, Belfast BT8 4RJ.

MICRO CBM 64 **Adventure** The Hulk **Problem** How do I change into the Hulk without the gas changing me back? How do I get outside without being crushed? **Name** Martin Fry **Address** 103 Wattleton Road, Beaconsfield, Bucks.

HAVE YOU BEEN staring at the screen for days, or given up in disgust, stuck in an adventure whose problems seem insurmountable? Adventure Contact may be the answer. This column is designed to put adventurers in touch with one another. When you're stumped a fellow adventurer may be able to help — and you may be able to solve other people's problems. If you are having difficulties with an adventure, fill in this coupon and send it to Adventure Contact, Micro Adventurer, 12/13 Little Newport St, London WC2R 3LD. We will publish Adventure Contact entries each month in this special column.

Micro ....

Adventure ....

Problem ....

....

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Name ....

Address ....

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Mud, Mud, Glorious Mud . . .

The first of a series of articles on Multi User Dungeon, written by one of the game's authors, ***Richard Bartle***

BACK IN 1980, when the PSS network was Experimental PSS (and hence free), a couple of students from Essex University used the facility to log onto the computer in the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory of MIT in America, and sent a message out on the ZORK mailing list. Due to the fact that EPSS was renowned for crashing any time it felt like it, the message had to be short and yet arouse the curiosity of those receiving it. The two students were myself and Roy Trubshaw, who were eager to let the world know about our new computer game. The message read, "You haven't lived 'til you've died in *MUD*".

Since those early days, when *MUD*'s only external players were those Americans patient enough to brave EPSS for a few minutes' play, *MUD* has spanned the globe. Recent players include people in Australia and Japan, and there are copies of *MUD* running in Portugal and Sweden. The game has built up a large following here in Britain, and has over 20,000 hours of playing time behind it.

For those who don't know, *MUD* stands for *Multi-User Dungeon*. It's the world's first adventure game which allows more than one person to wander around in its environment at the same time. This means that you're not the only intelligent being playing the game, and other real live people sitting at their own micros some miles away are there in the game with you, picking up the treasures you wanted to pick up yourself, shouting seemingly inane comments to other players you've not yet encountered, and setting about with a large axe when you finally come across someplace that hasn't been looted ahead of you.

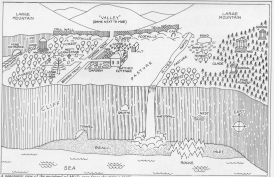
MUD is big — **very** big. It runs on Essex University's DECsystem-10 computer, which during the daytime services the whole of the campus. Only at night does it have any spare capacity, and it is then that the university generously opens up *MUD* to people out in the real world, or "externals" as they are known in *MUD*speke ("internals" are people who play it from the university itself).

Now the reason I'm telling you all this in a magazine called *Micro Adventurer* and not one called *Mainframe Adventurer* is because, like it or not, in the next few years multi-player games like *MUD* are going to become the dominating factor in adventure games. The reason for this is quite simple — *MUD*s are absolutely fantastic to play! The fact that it's You against Them, rather than You against It, adds an extra electricity you just can't experience in a single-player game. If you like adventure games already, *MUD* will absolutely slay you (often literally!).

And, of course, you WILL be able to

A wizard's eye view of the land of MUD, showing the salient features and hazards





A panoramic view of the mainland of MUD, seen from the vicious rocks

play on your micro, although not the same way as you do at present. In the current arrangement, you buy (a likely story!) your cassette and run the software on your own machine; when *MUD* goes commercial you won't be able to get a copy anywhere in the shops. What you will be able to get is some sort of package, explaining to you all you ever wanted to know about the game, and access details on how to contact the host computer over some network. You follow these instructions and there you are, in a game with 100 other people, who are also sitting at home playing on the mainframe via their own micros. The only cost is that for the network (telephone, cable or whatever) and around a pound an hour peak times for the game itself.

The *MUD* program comes in two parts, the database and the interpreter. The former is a description of the world, what will happen if people type certain things, and what will happen of its own accord whether you do anything or not. The latter is the program which takes in commands from the user and follows the sequence of actions which this entails as defined in the database. To clarify this, you can look on the database as if it were, say, a BASIC program. It describes exactly what it is you want to happen, but doesn't actually **do** anything. The interpreter is like the BASIC interpreter, which reads in the program (database) and brings it to life. *MUD's* interpreter comes in two parts, one which compiles the human-readable database into computer-readable form, and one which loads and runs this.

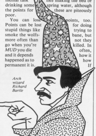
There are three *MUD* databases at present: *MUD, VALLEY* and *ROCK*. *MUD* is the main one, *VALLEY* is a smaller area which adjoins it; travel between the two is possible, although communication isn't. *ROCK* is a version of ITV's *Fraggle Rock*, and is generally regarded to be impossibly deadly! *MUD* has over 400 rooms, the other two are about 100 each. For this reason, I'll tend to talk about *MUD* most of the time.

The reason for partitioning *MUD* in this way is that you can port it over to other machines very easily, at least in theory. All you need to do is to rewrite the interpreter, and the database can remain unchanged. Unfortunately, the database is at quite a high level, and the interpreter is pretty collossal. When *MUD* is rewritten for commercial use (ie you pay to play), the interpreter will be much smaller, the brunt of the work being done in the database because it's more transportable.

When you run *MUD* it looks, to start with, like an average adventure game. It asks you for a name, what sex you want to be, and a password. Then it gives you the description of the first room. *MUD's* descriptions are normally 7 or 8 lines long — any more and you'd get killed in the time you took reading them! The object descriptions come on separate lines (to give some hint that they're not actually part of the description, and you can DO things to them), and so does the information about who is present in the room with you.

The aim of *MUD* is to collect points. There are three ways to do this. The most common way is to get treasure and drop it in the swamp, which effectively puts it out of the game so points can't be scored for it twice. The second most common way is by killing people. When you top another player, you get 1/24 of their points, in general. The third way is to do some menial task like making the bed or drinking some spring water, although the points for these are piteously poor.

You can lose points, too. Points can be lost for doing stupid things like trying to smoke the wolfsbane, but more often than not they go when you're killed. In *MUD* you die often, and it depends how it happened as to how permanent it is. If


Arch wizard Richard Bartle

◀ you're dead, it usually means you did something which killed you, like jump off the cliff without some sort of parachute, or drink some poison or whatever. This in *MUD*speke, the jargon *MUD* players use, is termed as being "dead". You can come back from being dead, but you lose points for it. If you are killed in a fight, however, you end up permanently deceased, or "dead dead". Hence, although fights have good rewards for winning, they're soul-destroying when you lose! The only way to be dead for doing something silly is if you carry the uranium around with you, ignoring the messages about how tired you feel.

Since players with more points tend to be more popular targets for those with an urge to kill, they have better attributes than those they started with. *MUD* generates a random set of characteristics for you when you start — your "persona". These are strength, stamina and dexterity. The other *Dungeons & Dragons* abilities are up to you, so if you're thick in real life you'll be thick in the game. The abilities are used mainly in fights, where stamina is how much damage you can take, strength determines how much damage you do when you hit, and dexterity is your chance of hitting. They crop up in other places too; for example dexterity is used to see if you manage to steal from another player successfully.

This is the near future I'm describing. There's nothing technologically complicated about it, since *MUD* has been up and running for the past four years on the University's machine. In order to get you all used to the idea, and give you a taste for the Things to Come, I'll be doing a semi-regular column here devoted to *MUD* and the Adventure games you'll be playing in five years' time.

For the next few months, I'll be using the pages of this illustrious magazine (well they pay me to write this so they must be illustrious!) to talk about *MUD* and how it's developing. I'll keep you up to date with how the commercial version of the game is getting on, and some of the improvements which will be incorporated into it. I'll introduce you to some of the characters who play the game at the moment, or have done in the past, and what's gone on in the game since I last wrote. Hints and tips will leak out from time to time to keep you all interested for when you ever get to play yourself, plus some insight into the strange tongue which *MUD* players use when they converse with one another. □

Details of how to access *MUD* can be obtained by writing to Richard Bartle, Department of Computer Science, Essex University, Colchester, Essex, CO4 3SQ.

ONE OF the features of MUD is that if you type LOG at it, it copies all output to a file so you can peruse it later at your leisure. Hours of endless amusement can be had by looking at other people's LOG files which they have left lying around.

Consider the plight of two of our very first externals, who played from the USA back in 1980. One of them had been in before, but his friend hadn't, and fortunately for us thought you had to LOG into the game to play. This meant all his activities were recorded for posterity, unbeknown to him.

Also in the game was Niatram, one of the system operators (who can't spell his name backwards). He decided to loom up on this second character, follow him around a bit, then kill him. This he repeated several times, gaining plenty of points in the process. Finally, the newcomer was at his wits' end.

"Who's this Niatram character?" he asked his friend. "He keeps following me around and killing me!". "Yes, he's done that to me before", came the reply, "I think he may be dungeon generated!" At this point Niatram appeared, and out of despair his victim quit, rather than be killed yet again by this "artificial person".

Subterranean Adventures in Zork

Trek through the land of Zork with **Barry Miles**

INFOCOM ADVENTURES are a special breed, and have become a real cult in the United States. Three of Infocom's games, *Zork I, Zork II* and *Zork III* have generated so much interest that they have been published as game books.



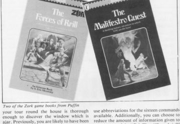
In addition, *Zork* addicts may buy a whole host of aids to assist them in their exploration of the Underground Kingdom. These range from maps onward. (We are seeing the beginnings of this in the United Kingdom, with Melbourne House publishing a book on how to win at *The Hobbit).*

If you are a bit jaded with ordinary run-of-the-mill verbal adventures, then Infocom is for you. The sophistication of the messages you receive, and the very advanced way in which you communicate with the programs is what makes them different.

None of these games make any use of graphics at all. Some addicts of arcade adventures will find this boring, but those who find it boring to wait while pictures, however interesting, are drawn, will feel otherwise! It all depends if you prefer pictures or words, but if you would rather spend your time reading a novel than watching its television adaptation, then Infocom games could be just your thing. Commodore clearly believe that price has previously deterred a wide range of potential customers from buying these games, and they have reduced the prices drastically.

The *Zork Trilogy* is best sampled in sequence. *Zork I* is an intermediate adventurer's game, *Zork II* caters for the intermediate to advanced player, and *Zork III* is for the advanced to postgraduate adventurer. As with solving crossword puzzles, you eventually start to see inside the mind of the adventure author. Consequently, game-lore picked up at the easier levels of playing can be invaluable at the higher levels.

In *Zork I, The Great Underground Empire,* you soon find yourself in a vast subterranean labyrinth, always supposing your tour round the house is thorough enough to discover the window which is ajar. Previously, you are likely to have been told that all windows are closed! However, these are magic circumstances, and in any case, events occur, as time passes, don't they?



Two of the Zork game books from Puffin

As usual, you are after treasure to gain points, and are impeded in your progress by various unfriendly beings. The labyrinth (which you will need to map as you travel) contains bits of written information, and various vehicles for visiting inaccessible and inhospitable areas, plus sundry weapons and containers of limited capacity.

It may seem strange to consider the subject of user-friendliness, where games software is concerned. However, playing an adventure is often a long drawn out affair, and certainly where Infocom is concerned, a highly thoughtful process. You will therefore spend a considerable length of time playing the game. As a result, you will appreciate the steps which have been taken to make life easier for you.

First you have the advantage of the way in which *Zork* can understand full sentences. You are able to converse with the program in a higher level language than is usual in such games, and so "Take all but the lamp" or "Drop all but the candle" will be understood.

Only the first six letters of any word are paid attention to by the game, and you can use abbreviations for the sixteen commands available. Additionally, you can choose to reduce the amount of information given to you, by use of the "Brief" or "Superbrief" commands. A full description is obtained by typing "L" or LOOK. Alternatively, all future descriptions become full if you type "verbose".



You can save the game at any point. Canny adventurers will do this when about

to embark on any potentially dangerous enterprise!

You can also obtain a continuous printout of all screen displays. This will reduce note-taking to a minimum, and, as the game can be solved in a variety of ways, such a printout can be invaluable.

Interest is maintained by your being able to find out your current score at any time! All in all a very good adventure for those with experience, but too complex for beginners.



In *Zork II, The Wizard of Frobozz*, the plot thickens. You continue on your merry way, much as before, collecting treasures, and fighting off opponents. However, you now have a Wizard to contend with, who has a rather malicious sense of humour. He casts various spells on you, which impede your progress, and cause you to rely rather heavily on *Zork's* "WAIT" command. (This command enables you to cause time to pass, so that you may discover what happens).

Since you suffer more trials and tribulations than in *Zork I*, you may find the medical report, (called up by the DIAGNOSE command) is invoked more frequently too!

If coping with an old Wizard, somewhat absent-minded but nonetheless still effective spell-wise, is your scene, then *Zork II* should suit you. You also get to slay a dragon, and operate a balloon, although not necessarily both at the same time!

In *Zork III, The Dungeon Master*, you pit your wits against the big cheese himself. Before computers came on the scene *Dungeons and Dragons* enthusiasts were at the mercy of the individual who took all the decisions which are nowadays taken by the computer — the Dungeon Master. In *Zork III*, you must find out what his devious purpose is.

If you consider yourself to be a pretty slick adventurer, then you owe it to yourself to give at least one of these games a whirl. You may not win, but you are likely to be kept thoroughly amused along the way!

Full marks to Commodore for bringing these games into the realms of the affordable. □





Adventures
Zork I
The Great Underground Empire
Zork II
The Wizard of Frobozz
Zork III
The Dungeon Master

Micro	*Commodore 64*
Format	*Disc*
Price	*£11.99*
Supplier	*Vicsoft, CBM UK Ltd, Weldon North Industrial Estate, Corby, Northants, NN17 1LU*

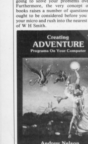
Adventure programs brought to book

***John Fraser** leafs through a selection of books on how to design your own adventures. Next month sees the start of a regular book review section, covering computer books, game books, and related topics.*

DESPITE the growing popularity of commercial adventures, many enthusiasts prefer to draw on the worlds of their own imagination, rather than someone else's. But, sometimes, the sheer size and complexity of the task is enough to deter them altogether, with the result that they never progress beyond playing prepackaged scenarios.

If you happen to be one of these frustrated adventurers, there is no longer any need to despair, because now experienced programmers have recognised your plight and set down on paper their accumulated wisdom with the express aim of teaching you the art.

It must be said, however, that this wealth of literature on how to write your own wonderful mind-bending adventures, is not going to solve your problems overnight. Furthermore, the very concept of such books raises a number of questions which ought to be considered before you unplug your micro and rush into the nearest branch of W H Smith.



Firstly, there is nothing quite so tedious as being hunched over a keyboard (particularly the Spectrum's) for several hours in an attempt to translate your brilliant idea into seemingly endless screenfuls of code. Unless you can afford an adventure-generating program such as *The Quill* or *Dungeon Builder*, that's exactly what you are in for — and not even the books will remove that drudgery.

Not surprisingly, few adventure enthusiasts write a game just for something to do on a rainy afternoon. Generally, the motivation is at least partly financial: the thought of earning a living from one's hobby, perhaps even of tax havens or a yacht in the Mediterranean. Whatever your ultimate ambition, do not be misled by those blurbs which promise that "you'll soon be creating magnificent games of your own." No book can teach you to do that, but what they can provide you with are the necessary techniques and concepts; the rest depends on the power of your own imagination.

> *"A range of books to suit most tastes"*

Secondly, the programming techniques used in writing adventures are much the same as those used in writing other programs. Once you know how to input data into an array, manipulate strings and so on, you will be well on the way to being able to write one. On the other hand, if such things only induce anxiety, you would do better to buy one of the numerous introductory books available and get to grips with the fundamentals of Basic first.

Finally, ask yourself what you really want a book for, because if it's just to key in someone elses listing, you'll have a pretty good idea of how to solve the game before you even run it. Almost certainly, it will take you much less time to solve than it did to key in, which makes all those hours of toil seem rather pointless.

After what I've written so far, you may have reached the conclusion that all these hefty volumes crammed with unbelievably long listings are nothing more than publishing gimmicks created to enlarge the bank accounts of struggling authors and publishers. Well, this is not entirely true; there is a range of books to suit most tastes, and some are genuinely useful.

Most of these titles follow an almost identical pattern: explanation, historical introduction, worked example. They differ widely, however, in the amount of information they contain and the number and type (i.e. text or graphic) of adventures which they describe. Some offer several listings for each micro; others offer several versions of the same listing; and a few even fail to specify which machine was used to produce them. Hopefully, by the time you've read this article, you'll be in a better position to decide which is the book for you — or even whether you need one at all.

To begin with, let's examine a couple of books which are not machine-specific, but which nevertheless contain listings that can easily be adapted for the Spectrum. The first of these makes a radical departure from the standard format.

Andrew Nelson's *Creating Adventure Programs on your Computer* is — or so the blurb proclaims — "another great book from Interface Publications." Instead of beginning with the usual explanation of what an adventure game is and how they developed, it launches straight into a mini-adventure similar to those in Penguin's Fighting Fantasy Gamebook series; this is then used as the author's first computer adventure.

Unfortunately, my copy of the book appears to have met with a disaster in the printing works, and sorting out the text is itself something of an adventure. However, no one else seems to have had the same problem. Interface first published the book in October 1983, and have received no other complaints about it.

Sophistication

For all that, the book is quite useful. Andrew Nelson has provided three games of increasing sophistication, with both a basic and an elaborated version of the first offering, *Werewolves and Wanderers*. He's also generously included a print-out of the screen displays which shows you what the game is like actually running. Only *Werewolves and Wanderers* is described in any detail, although this doesn't matter very much as the second game, a space adventure, demonstrates how it can be used as the foundation for totally different scenarios, without having to start from scratch. All you do is load the first game and work through the listing, changing the lines where appropriate.



The final game consists of over forty locations and demands rather more brawn than brain, as there's plenty of monster bashing. Despite this limitation, and a small vocabulary, you are able to control your attributes and so the game is not the same every time you play it.

"A matter of personal preference"

There are also helpful appendices, including a character name generator, a section on further reading, and a list of games manufacturers and distributors. Chapter 21 (which, incidentally, has been printed twice) offers suggestions for enhancing the appeal of your games and, though brief, gives some advice worth considering.

As far as I can discover, the book makes no mention of which machine was used to produce the listings, but converting them for the Spectrum should be no problem.

At least with Keith Campbell's *Computer and Video Games Book of Adventure* you don't get lost trying to sort out the pages. It's a well produced and readable book, but because it's not machine-specific it may well cause some annoyance to those who want value for money — and who doesn't these days?

Only one game is described, and there are listings for the BBC, Spectrum and Commodore 64. This means, inevitably, that if you only have one machine much of the book will be of no use to you. Add to that the demonstration program which was written on a TRS 80 and the conversion notes, and you may well be disappointed.

According to no less an authority than Scott Adams, who has written the foreword, the book contains "a wonderful recipe for baking your own adventures." Maybe so, but I expect some readers willtake that with a pinch of magic potion. It's one thing to have the right ingredients, but quite an other to turn those ingredients into a commercial product.

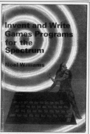
The game itself is notably lacking in complexity. With only ten locations it nowhere near matches the scale of those in some of the other books reviewed here. Nevertheless, it's likely to appear rather less daunting to the newcomer and the text is clearly written, with each stage of the programming covered in easily digested portions.

Most Spectrum users, however, will naturally want a book that is machine specific, and there are three which can be recommended. Which is the better book is really a matter of personal preference, how familiar you are with Basic, whether you like text or graphic adventures, and what your expectations are.

Of the three, one stands out as being more of a collection of listings to key in and run. In fact *Creating Adventure Programs on the ZX Spectrum*, written by those teenage whizz-kids Peter Shaw and James Mortleman, offers no less than seven adventures for £4.95. The first half of the book looks at the necessary techniques — creating locations, adding graphics and so on — but the explanations are minimal, which is no bad thing as you're likely to learn more by following a listing through to see how it works.

One book which covers both text and graphic adventures is Noel Williams' *Invent and Write Games Programs for the Spectrum*. Although the word adventure appears nowhere in the title, adventures are the author's main concern, and he provides three examples, together with many more useful routines. The first game, *The Throne of Camelot*, is a traditional puzzle adventure with over sixty locations. Then there is *The Mines of Merlin*, a role playing type game in which your attributes and possessions are continually updated as you





battle with monsters and wander through dark caverns. Finally, in *Treasure Trove*, you use the cursor keys to manoeuvre a little man around the screen to pick up jewels before your time runs out. The adventure element of the last program is debatable, but the game is thoroughly explained and illustrates techniques for those who wish to incorporate arcade action into their adventures.

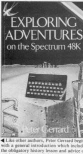
"Appeal to the uninitiated"

Noel Williams has done his best to cater for every interest. He can't obviously devote an equal amount of space to everything, so you don't get a highly elaborate graphic adventure, for instance. Even so, the book is remarkably comprehensive and will no doubt gain a wide readership not only among adventurers, but also among those interested in other games who recognise the universal value of the techniques used.

The final book reviewed is perhaps the one most likely to appeal to the uninitiated, even though the author (if we are to believe his introductory remarks) does have to sustain himself with large quantities of alcohol when playing adventures!

Peter Gerrard's *Exploring Adventures on the Spectrum 48K* contains three text adventures which only accept simple verb-noun inputs, but are nevertheless far more substantial offerings than those in similar books. One of the games, *Underground Adventure*, contains no less than one hundred locations and is fully explained, section by section. Only the listings are presented for the other two, but if you have followed Underground Adventure, this should be no handicap. ▶


GO FOR GOLD
Spectrum 48K
UNITED
PACIFIC WAR
GANGSTERS!
STRATEGY GAMES
BATTLE 1917
WARGAMES
IN OUR STRATEGY PENTATHLON
All available for Spectrum 48K at £5.95.
Selected titles available from larger branches of Boots, Greens, John Lewis Partnership, Rumbelows, W. H. Smith and all good computer shops or mail order from
Cases Computer Simulations Ltd., 14 Langton Way, London SE3 7TL.
WHSMITH
Boots



◀ Like other authors, Peter Gerrard begins with a general introduction which includes the obligatory history lesson and advice on solving adventures. Before launching into his main example, he also discusses each of the commands for handling data and strings, then leads you gently into the necessary adventure routines.

"Transported via the printed word"

For timid adventurers this is probably the most accessible book. You don't have to sift through repeated pages or commands which bear no relation to what is on your keyboard. And, for anyone who should happen to lose his way in the text, there is an index. Surprisingly, none of the other books possess one; a trivial point, perhaps, but when you're searching for ages for a particular routine it does relieve a good deal of frustration.

These are by no means all the books that cater for Spectrum adventurers. Others have appeared and more will certainly follow, as publishers endeavour to capture a share of this increasingly profitable market. Whatever your interest — text or graphics, physical combat or problem-solving, hostile alien environments or the familiar streets of your home town — the books will certainly help in translating your own scenarios into working programs.

Whether your results will be original and exciting enough to compete in the commercial arena and bring you financial rewards is another matter. But if you are seeking a challenge why not settle down, alone, and be transported, via the printed word, into the fascinating world of adventures. □

Book *The Computer and Video Games Book of Adventure* **Author** *Keith Campbell* **Publisher** *Melbourne House* **Price** *£5.95*
Book *Exploring Adventures on the Spectrum 48K* **Author** *Peter Gerrard* **Publisher** *Duckworth* **Price** *£6.95*
Book *Creating Adventure Programs on your Computer* **Author** *Andrew Nelson* **Publisher** *Interface* **Price** *£4.95*
Book *Creating Adventure Programs on the ZX Spectrum* **Authors** *Peter Shaw–James Mortleman* **Publisher** *Interface* **Price** *£4.95*
Book *Invent and Write Games Programs for the ZX Spectrum* **Author** *Noel Williams* **Publisher** *McGraw-Hill* **Price** *£6.95*

BOARDWALK

A new section covering non-computer games

Family fantasy

Game *Talisman* **Price** *£7.95* **Format** *Board Game* **Publisher** *Games Workshop*

TALISMAN is the latest product of Games Workshop's campaign to repackage fantasy role playing games for every possible market. This time the target is the casual board games player drawn to the fantasy element in *D & D* but intimidated by anything more complex than *Monopoly*. Rumour has it that GW intended to launch it as a computer game next.

Indeed, *Talisman* has a lot of the usual features of those 'family' games. The board is split into three concentric rings, each of which is divided into segments, round which the players usually move by rolling a die. Encounters are determined by adventure cards, which are picked up according to which square the player lands on. The element of role-playing is introduced by offering the players the choice of eleven traditional D & D type characters to choose from, the individual characteristics of which are laid out on cards.

Players win by moving through the increasingly dangerous rings to the centre of the board, from where they cast spells which, very slowly, kill their opponents off. Before they are able to make this move, they must build up the strength and magic ability of their characters, and acquire spells, followers, and possessions, all of which are represented by cards or little bits of cardboard.



The game is very well produced: brightly coloured and hard wearing. The characters are well-balanced, but sufficiently different from each other to allow a great deal of variety and the cards and board provide an interesting selection of events.

Unfortunately, the attempt to reach the family has lead to problems. The rules are very brief for this kind of game, and there are several ambiguities. The players have to work out how to use the cards from skimpy and vague descriptions given on them. The rules do not adequately explain what to do with the face up cards on the boards. Indeed, it is the cards that are one of the chief problems. They rapidly litter the board, obscuring the already barely legible instructions on the squares, and clogging up the play. Furthermore, the various adventure, spell, and possession cards must be divided into fifteen separate piles before play can start. During the game players may have as many as a dozen cards in front of them which must all be visible.

In addition to these mechanical problems the game is tedious. There is very little

Dallas—death and double-dealing

Chris Harvey, owner of play by mail company ICBM, reports from Origins 84, the premier US games convention, which was held in Dallas this year.

ORIGINS, the major games convention in the USA, is about as unlike any UK games convention as one can imagine. Several thousand people wander quietly for four days around 100 dealer stands, and generally take their time about playing an awful lot of games. At its busiest, the dealer area looks more like a wet Monday afternoon in a small supermarket, than the condensed mass scrimmage we have come to expect from Britain's Games Day.

This year little happened. Few new games were released, in sharp contrast with 1983 in Detroit. Most games companies have decided that a mass release of games at one convention does NOT help sales, and thus about the only item of interest was Steve Jackson's *Globbo*. Certainly, all the major companies were representd (even TSR) but although the games on show were varied in quality and subject, the vast majority were already on sale across the USA when the convention began.



Chris Harvey of ICBM

The real fun to be found in Dallas was in playing the games. A shuttle bus service (essential in 100° heat) fed players from the convention Hall through two main hotels. Fantasy freaks were based in the Holiday Inn (which might have accounted for the fact that the fire alarms were set off two nights running) whereas the more staid, and generally older, wargames contingent huddled together in the Regent, a hotel that can be recommended only for losing all electrical power on Saturday night, and for double booking the Bridal suite.

All facets of the gaming hobby seemed to get down to business quickly. The Monster Wargames Society ran several three *day* long games, dozens of seminars were held all over the site (some even on time and in the right rooms), and the open gaming sections continued in operation all day which is more than can be said for the lifts.

American gamers seem to be older in general and more serious about their hobby, but for concentrated game playing you would have to go a long way to find a bigger event.

player interaction, and the game ends with a whimper. The player who reaches the centre can cast spells each turn, depriving the other players of one life each a turn. Since they might have a dozen lives, plus neutralising and healing spells, this can take a very long time. This raises a final problem, one which may scare off the happy family after one game: *Talisman* takes much longer than the recommended one hour to play. **PGB**

Auto destruct

Game *Battlecars* **Format** *Board Game* **Price** *£6.95* **Publisher** *Games Workshop* **Game** *Battlebikes* **Format** *Board Game* **Price** *£4.95* **Publisher** *Games Workshop*

BATTLECARS is an attempt to sell wargames to the casual buyer. Jan Livingstone's design is obviously inspired by *Car Wars*, published by Steve Jackson Games in the States. *Car Wars*, in turn, owes a great deal to the movie *Mad Max*.

It should be made clear that there are two Steve Jacksons, one of Games Workshop and the other a native of the States. They are in no way related. Common usage these days is to indicate which is which by putting (US) or (UK) after their names.

The winner in *Battlecars* is the player whose driver is the last one left alive. Unlike *Car Wars* the players don't design their own cars, instead selecting from several pre-designed vehicles with slightly differing speed, maneuverability, and defensive and weapon capabilities.

Also unlike *Car Wars* movement is not simultaneous. This is one of the most serious flaws in the game. The player who moves first can accelerate to full speed, knowing the other cars will not move before a damaging side or rear ram can be engineered. If the maneouvre is executed correctly, a player can also launch missiles at point blank range just before the ram. It is possible in this way to eliminate opponents before they have fired a shot.

The immense destructive potential of the weapons means the suggested playing time of one to two hours is highly fanciful. A healthy aggressive approach will usually lead to very short games.

For fans of intense violence the game is great fun, but the lack of scope for tactical innovation means it rapidly ceases to be interesting.

Like most Games Workshop games, *Battlecars* is attractively designed and solidly constructed. The rules, however, manifest the equally common GW habit of sacrificing clarity for brevity.

Battlecars and Battlebikes will soon, we are told, be available for the home computer. It will be interesting to see how much the board version can be improved on for that medium. **PGB**

Who are the Lords of Midnight?

THIS MONTH, in a special mini competition, *Micro Adventurer* offers readers a chance to win nine free turns in *Starlord*, the Play-By-Mail game run by *Lords of Midnight* author Mike Singleton.

The questions are:

1 Name all the citadels in the Land of Midnight.
2 Name all the Lords of the Free.
3 There are at least four ways to destroy the Ice Crown.

What are they?

The first all correct answer received will win.

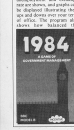
Big brother

Adventure *1984 A Game of Government Management* **Micros** *BBC B, Spectrum 48K* **Price** *£6.50, £5.50* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Incentive Software Ltd., 54 London Street, Reading, Berkshire.*

EVER THOUGHT you could do better than politicians you've seen? Now's your chance. You, with no effort on your part, suddenly become the Prime Minister of the UK. Then you have to keep the job. Supplied to help you do this is 'The Pocket Guide to Running Britain', a 14 page cassette-sized leaflet, containing all manner of useful info.

There is very little in this game that is randomly determined. Each simulation starts with the actual 1984 figures, and the books balance, so all you have to do is keep them balanced. Easy enough. Wrong. Apart from taxes, benefits and so on you have to cope with wage rises, interest rates, grants, banking and just about everything else. As well as being the PM, you have to do the jobs of the rest of the government.

Playing *1984* is very easy, succeeding is not. You can't make too much of a mess straight away, because most of the inputs have limits, and you will be told when you exceed these. Each year the major indicators, such as inflation, unemployment and exchange rate are shown, and graphs can be displayed illustrating their ups and downs over your term of office. The program also shows how balanced the economy is. This is often your first indication of a dangerous instability. When the wage rise section comes round you only get one try at each employment sector. I think adding a chance of negotiation would be a good idea.



A most effective feature is the occasional meeting of Parliament where you are asked to make rulings on various issues. The longer you stay in office, the harder it is to survive. This is due to the fact that minor imbalances can have quite widespread effects. I also find it harder to satisfy the unions over wage rises.

1984 is probably a very realistic simulation, and is a fascinating insight into the economy. The program is neatly packaged, and very well presented. On the BBC version, with the exception of the title page, the program uses mode 7, with the only graphics being in the form of graphs. The sound effects are fairly simple, but become tiring after a while. There are many ways to be evicted from No. 10, from full-scale revolution to inept ministers. To stay in office, a lot of concentration and thought will be necessary.

Can you win the general elections and make it to the 21st century? *1984* is very compulsive. The first few times had me chucked out within a few years, or losing the election badly, but now I've nearly got to 1999. If you like strategy – simulations, then this is a must. **AT**

SOFTWARE INVENTORY

What's on the way in the adventure world — if you have a new adventure, war game or real-life simulation which you are about to release send a copy and accompanying details to Software Inventory, Micro Adventurer, 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2R 3LD

Previous Pettigrew

Adventure *Operation Safras* **Micro** *Dragon 32* **Price** *£7.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Shards Software, Suite G, Roycraft House, 15 Linton Road, Barking, Essex.*

A REVIEWER in the July issue referred to Shards' *Pettigrew's Diary* as the third greatest computer adventure ever. I wouldn't even rate it in the top ten Dragon adventures, so what of the sequel that's actually a prequel, *Operation Safras?*

It takes a similar format, being three separate sections, each one of which you must complete to progress to the next, with the middle one again being a kind of text adventure. The first chapter, though, *The Awakening*, is all about graphics and sound. It gives you a data file on Rupert James Pettigrew (which is you, so there should be no surprises there) and then follows a graphic description of the start to Pettigrew's day, as you walk to the tube station and descend in the lift.

There your troubles begin, as the lift fills with water and you must work out which button to press to get yourself out. Then you are faced with a series of questions, testing your observation of what's been happening, and finally you are given the code for the second part of the adventure . . . though even the code is in code! Until you get that code, though, you will have to sit through four minutes of graphics at the start of this first section before you even get to touch the keyboard — as good as they are, four minutes is too long to sit through each and every time.

The Searching sets Pettigrew on the loose in the UK, armed with a map, a list of towns you can visit, £500, and a most vital piece of equipment, the agent locator. You need this because five fellow agents are held captive somewhere in the UK, and these are indicated at the bottom of the screen, a cursor showing the nearest one to your location. Unfortunately there is also a number displayed beneath each, showing the hours remaining to them. Obviously you must set about tracking down the one with fewest hours left to him, which you do by collecting clues from characters you meet as you GO LIVERPOOL, GO ABERDEEN and so on. Not easy at all, but nor did I find it particularly engrossing.

The final section, like *Pettigrew*, is a collection of different challenges, eight this time. Again I found them a motley collection of little programs, too jumbled and disjointed to allow you any belief in the overall story of these adventures of Pettigrew. Axe-wielding giants in a modern day spy story? No, I can't say Pettigrew grew on me. **MG**

Magic Moments

Adventure *The Sorcerers Apprentice* **Micro** *Commodore 64* **Price** *£6.99* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Phoenix Software Ltd, Spangles House, 116 Marsh Road, Pinner, Middlesex.*



SORCERER'S APPRENTICE is a double game, one program on each side of the tape. The first is an arcade game, which you must play at least until the end of the first level to get the password, which allows you to start the adventure game on the flip side of the tape. Magic, isn't it?

The arcade game can be used with joystick or keyboard. The object of the game is to take the magician's place whilst he soaks up the Margate sun, and stop the magic brooms overfilling the reservoir by stealing their buckets of water. You may freeze all objects except yourself for four seconds by pressing the fire button.

There are four levels, each with more of the same but faster and more plentiful, therefore harder to get through. At the end of each level you will find useful hints and clues for the adventure game. Completing the first level is essential to starting the adventure game as it reveals the secret password.

Happily, it is not necessary to play the arcade game, as Phoenix supply a packet containing the password and several clues. Both games loaded without too many problems, although I did have to assist the adventure game somewhat — perhaps a duff tape!

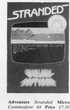
The aim of the adventure game is to travel through the wizard's kingdom in search of the 'throne of all knowledge'. In the finishing stages of the game you may need to draw on your knowledge of Roman mythology, or ask someone. If this isn't successful, then guess! But remember, guesses could have fatal results.

Magic is a constant theme in this game, so be careful to find your spell book at the start of the game, and put spells that you find 'in' it. The commands are essentially the same as other adventure games with additions such as 'in book', which places a spell in your spell book after you have picked it up. The spell can then be read, and you get a clue to its effect. The game also accepts all of the abbreviations we have come to know and love in adventure classics.

The game comes with an instruction leaflet which is good enough to get you started, but be sure to check everything you come across carefully as most locations are useful. You will also need good map keeping, as you will often be given advice that requires a great deal of back-tracking. At the start, don't be too hasty to move on; make sure you have collected all the available spells, and explored all locations within that area. Also save the game if you are not sure of which spell to use, and be sparing with the spells.

Although not as exciting as *Valhalla* or *The Hobbit*, *Sorcerer's Apprentice* is an excellent adventure that should keep you entertained and frustrated for some time. My Sunday was spent playing this game with much success, but I was always left wanting more. Excellent value for money and a professionally produced game. Have a look at the protection, it was good enough to keep me guessing for a while! **KB**

Stranded Sid



Adventure *Stranded* **Micro** *Commodore 64* **Price** *£7.95* **Format** *Turbo tape* **Supplier** *English Software Company, Box 43, Manchester M60 3AD.*

THE BIGGEST adventure in life at the moment seems to be England's attempts at wresting a victory from the hands of the West Indies, so I thought I'd try my hand at something slightly better than facing up to Joel Garner. *Stranded*, a graphical adventure for the Commodore 64 from the English Software Company, seemed as good a place to start as any.

The game begins with you marooned on a strange planet. Your mission: to escape from the planet and return home safely. Your spaceshlip lies nearby, but it is unfortunately guarded by an evil-looking robot who is none too keen on your getting into it. You are in this somewhat strange position as you were mugged earlier on (while celebrating the completion of another succesful space epic) by some unknown intruders.

This is not a brilliant game. The cassette cover boasts that the game has more than 35 graphic screens: presumably this means 36. In defence of the graphics they are quite good, and do appear with satisfying speed when drawn, but they appear to have made the rest of the game suffer as a result of their being there. There are some surprising flaws in the logic of the program.

After the usual bumbling around trying to find anything that might be vaguely useful, you should come across a fuel capsule, a lockpick, a laser rifle and a parachute. Armed with these, you can go on board the spaceship itself, since the robot guarding it is no more partial to laser rifles than you or I would be. Once there, the inconsistencies of the program start to appear. No matter how many times you pick the lock of an airlock that bars your way, every time you leave it and come back to it again it has to be unlocked yet again. The robot can also be shot countless number of times without coming to any harm: curious beasts, these robots.

From here on in is anyone's guess, as you get killed with startling frequency on board the ship: walking down a corridor with a warm glow in it has you being fried alive, going beyond an airlock has you thrown into outer space and dying. All these, and more, make this a deeply unsatisfying game. It doesn't even understand the word 'EXAMINE' (you have to use EXAM instead), and with the added restriction of just being able to use the VERB-NOUN format when entering your commands, this is not a game to come back to.

On reflection, I'd prefer facing Joel Garner. **PG**

Apocalypse approaches

Adventure *Ground Zero* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Price** *£6.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Artic Computing, Main Street, Brandesburton, Driffield, YO25 8RG*

PACK AWAY your wands, elixirs and double-handed enchanted swords and step into the less esoteric, and ultimately more frightening world of Artic's *Ground Zero*. Set not in Middle Earth, but in the very real world of nuclear Superpower conflict, you are Mr Average, residing in 'Dunroamin', in quiet suburbia — except that the world is in a grave period of international tension, with the threat of a holocaust looming high.

At the start of the adventure, you are placed in your semi in a lonely cul-de-sac. On switching on the TV, you break into a civil defence warning. The telephone rings to announce the loss of all services. On exploring the house and garden, you find various essential objects, such as keys, a knife, a mattress and



an old door to construct a shelter against the blast with, and, in the kitchen cupboards, some food, but with the ominous label "a week's rations". The temptation is to sit around and wait for the worst, but, against the advice on the TV, I went out to explore the town, pausing only to restart the game after being trapped in the neighbour's garden.

Outside, the situation is grim, with riots in the High Street, hoarders queuing at the corner shop and trigger-happy soldiers guarding the motorway. The atmosphere created by the program is first class, encouraging the player to feverishly type in commands before the bomb drops. This scene-setting is done with no graphics and fairly short descriptions. Technically, too, the game is of a high standard, with an instant response to input and a very large, and wittily used, vocabulary, although on most occasions it does only accept the traditional Verb-Noun format. Essentially, a save-game facility is provided.

The object of the game is Protect and Survive, and, with the grim setting, it will provide quite a challenge to those tired of the more arcane adventure scenarios and has to be recommended. **GW**

Do it with Diyad

Timeless XII I II III IV V VI VII VIII IX X XI Software

DIYAD, from Timeless Software, tries to do for the TI99 what *The Quill* has done for the Spectrum. It allows you to create adventures by defining your own objects, locations and vocabulary, then inserting these into a base program which carries out all the complicated string-handling routines for you. Thus it should be possible to write your own adventure with little or no knowledge of programming.

The program is not very easy to use; you must first set up a "File" by loading and running Side One of the cassette. This file is dumped to a blank tape, then loaded into side two of *Diyad*, which is the "Player" program. Considering the slowness of the TI99, this can be a very long process.

Diyad adventures are defined in terms of places, things, verbs, and verb cases. Each place has a description and a number — home base is number one. *Diyad* also requires definitions of the Places reached by going North, South, East, West, Up and Down from each location. Places can also have attributes of light or darkness.

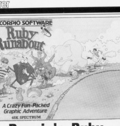
Each verb defined is accompanied by one or more cases, which describe a set of conditions which have to be met and a set of preconditions. Things can start out a Place or can be created by a verb case.

All the data to manipulate this information is stored in data strings, in a format calculated to make the most of the TI99's limited memory.

Eleven verbs are pre-coded — Up, Down, N,S,E,W, Quit, Say, Go, Score and Look. The finished adventure thus operates in the conventional manner, with two-word inputs. There is provision for allowing different words to satisfy the same function ("Kill" and "Destroy" for instance) The composer program generates error messages in certain cases, but it is quite possible to write an adventure which, due to some miscalculation like defining two objects with the same name, can fall into an endless loop. Fortunately the manual is helpful on possible programming problems.

Diyad is a very worthy attempt to create an adventure generator for the TI99. Obviously you can't expect to see very user-friendly menu systems such as *The Quill* contains, nor the graphic facilities of Dream Software's *Dungeon Builder*, because the 99's memory is limited to 16K. It's unfortunate though that the *Diyad* manual gives the impression that the memory can be expanded, only to retract this in an addendum with the explanation that the *Diyad* program cannot access the extra memory in TI Basic.

Diyad isn't easy to use, but it's a good attempt considering the limitations of the machine. Congratulations to Timeless Software for tackling a field which has previously been untouched. **CJ**



Reggie's Ruby

Adventure *Ruby Runabout* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Format** *Cassette* **Price** *£1.99* **Supplier** *Scorpio Software, 147/155 Corn Exchange Building, Manchester 4*

WITH a title like *Ruby Runabout*, you might have expected a fast arcade-style adventure along the lines of *Jet Set Willy*. In fact, what you get is a midly amusing text and graphic adventure of the more traditional kind — forty locations to explore, half of which have graphics, puzzles to solve and lots of objects to pick up and try and find a use for.

You are Reggie the garage owner, who is desperate to own the world's most precious gem, the Rocksalmon Ruby. Your objective is to retrieve the ruby and take it home. But there's no time to lose, for if you delay you may find it has moved.

To accomplish this task you have to avoid numerous hazards which may hinder your progress or even terminate it altogether. There are lots of red-herrings; in fact you are likely to spend most of your time trying to decide what on earth to do with the odd collection of objects in your possession.

Some locations are also potentially dangerous to explore. On a few occasions your path is blocked by a person or an animal and excessive violence against either is not tolerated, so beware.

Mapping is straightforward and the screen presentation is clear and simple, although the descriptions are minimal — 'a garage', 'a bridge' — while the inputs are of the basic verb-noun type.

Unfortunately, there appear to be several strange anomalies in this game. For example, although the verb 'light' is accepted, I can't find anything to light. And the request to 'open door' merely brings the response, 'the key isn't in the door.' If it's not in the door, then where is it?

One or two locations stand out as being rather out of place in this adventure, which generally takes place in familiar every day places. Take the oil rig, for instance. How many of those do you see when walking down the street? Then there is the bridge, which the screen shows as nothing but a black rectangle.

For me, though, the most infuriating feature of the game is the inadequate help facility. This is extremely short on replies, some of which are obvious if you've read the documentation, while others don't provide any clues other than telling you what you are trying to do already. One response simply says 'I'm as lost as you are', which may be funny once, but becomes tiresome after half a dozen times.

Despite these criticisms, the game offers a challenge which should keep players busy for hours. Even though I've examined and tried to pick up, open and light just about everything possible, I've still only scored 30%. So now I sit and think, wondering how to grasp that elusive ruby…**JF**

Not all bugs are ants

Adventure *Four Gates to Freedom* **Micro** *Vic 20 16K* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Phoenix Software, 116 Marsh Road, Spangles House, Pinner, Middlesex.*

FOUR GATES to Freedom is a two sided cassette, with an adventure on one side and an arcade game on the other. The idea of the arcade game is to destroy four gates on the other side of a wall, by blasting a hole with your laser base. Having done this, you obtain the running code that allows you to load the adventure and play that. In the event of the arcade game proving more than a match for your trigger finger, Phoenix supply a "Phoenix Panic Packet", which contains the running code, as well as four clues for the four key parts of the adventure.

First, a short word about the arcade game. As arcade games go, it went. The graphics are average Vic quality, but the speed the game runs at leaves you breathless. This game is a real killer, and I suspect that to actually crack it, and destroy four gates, takes a lot of practice. I never managed it and resorted to the panic packet to progress on to the adventure. On reflection, I shouldn't have bothered.

The game requires 16K to load, and puts up an entirely unimpressive loader page whilst doing so. The first thing you have to do upon running is to enter the code, and then you've a typical text adventure. The year is 3112; a Vegan star cruiser has been captured by the Warrior Ants of Xzinos, and all the scientists and crew are being held in suspended animation by the nefarious insects in catacombs. You have to destroy the four gates that bar your entrance to the catacombs and rescue the unfortunate crew.

All stirring stuff, designed to set the adrenaline pulsing round. Until you play the game. If there is one thing I hate, it is illogical adventure maps. This one apparently changes as you are playing it — either that, or the program mis-interprets commands.

This, of course implies that the game has bugs. Do we have any evidence that the game does have bugs? You bet! Take the iron bar, for example. At one spot, your way is barred by an electric barrier. Enter 'SHORT BARRIER', and the program says 'How?'. So I entered 'USE ROD' and the program said 'You can now cross the pit safely'. This left me extremely perplexed: What pit? So I proceeded across the barrier . . . and died. Next time I ran the game, the barrier was in a different place. And the map changed when I tried a different route. So throw away the pen and paper, guys.

As for the rest of the game, it takes three letter directions (SOU NOR WES etc) and verbs such as GO, TAKE, USE, and even RE-ANIMATE, although I have never actually found a use for this one. There is the usual collection of riddles and puzzles, and the average quota of useful and useless objects.

Great arcade game; pity about the adventure. SS



On an odyssey built for two

Adventure *Galaxy's Edge* **Micro** *BBC B or two BBC Bs* **Price** *£7.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Magic Software Inc, Elmswell, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk*

GALAXY'S EDGE contains two games. The first, *Discovery*, is a standard text adventure. The second, however, is billed as the first game that can be played on two, linked, BBC micros simultaneously.

The first game, *Discovery*, is a conventional text only adventure in which you are in command of the Scout Ship, 'Orion'. Your mission is a test of your resources and ability.

The Orion is controlled by a computer, enabling you to take off, go into Hyperspace, dock with other craft and land on various planets. There are some clearly described locations, and the usual objects to collect and tasks to perform.

Pegasus is the most hospitable planet, with the greater number of objects to be found. Solaris has a hostile climate and is inhabited by some semi humanoid Aliens, which during my brief visit I only glimpsed but never met. Akrot is a barren ore producing satellite, and Manonis, I am afraid, I never did manage to visit, not for want of trying.

This is a playable adventure with good use of the function keys for the mundane necessity of moving — getting — examining — dropping — etc. You can have sound if you wish, which produces some interesting noises when taking off, firing the laser cannons and the hand gun. This feature should have been exploited far more in this game.



Programmer Graham Nelson

In my book, this adventure commits the cardinal sin — no Save–Restore facility. If you get zapped, which you will, then it's back to the start and begin all over again. After several attempts this just becomes a bore, and I do not understand why some Adventure programmers do not seem to realise that many of us play adventures like a book. We load and play for a while, then, if we tire, or everyday functions of running a household interupt, we save and switch off. If you read a book and put it down, you don't start again at chapter one — you carry on where you left off.

The second game, *Escape from Solaris*, is the first adventure that I have come across which can be played by two players, either on one

micro using the split screen facility, or by coupling two micros. The full instruction sheet gives all the necessary information, and once the game is loaded you will be asked to name your players.

You are both trained Scouts of the Second Empire, and find yourselves in an alien labryinth from which you must escape by gathering items and carrying out certain tasks. You both start in little grey cells, one at the North and one at the South. The game is played in the conventional adventure style, and to this end the function keys have been programmed to respond to some of the most common words employed, (i.e. all the directions, GET, DROP, EXAMINE, etc.) This certainly saves much key punching time.

When characters meet there is an immediate response on the screen. If A has moved North, the display may read "B is here," and at the same time on the other screen, "A has just entered." If B hits A, then A will be knocked down for two moves or so, and if this character was carrying any objects, these drop to the floor — which of course enables B to get them and make off. When at the same location, the characters can converse, but not when apart until one finds a certain object which then enables them to communicate where ever they are.

So we now find that these two characters can interact, albeit only to hit each other or communicate. Sounds fun doesn't it? Not for long I am afraid. Aimless wandering around and talking to each other is not going to get you very far, and as you know that only one character is going to be able to escape (provided the right objects are held) there comes a point in this adventure when fighting starts. Should one player have the advantage of knowing the layout and location of the objects, it becomes a very one sided game.

Conclusions — both players must be either completely new to the game, or must have intimate knowledge of the layout before commencing, which then defeats the whole object of an adventure. I believe that this is where this one falls flat on its face — nice idea, shame about the game. **DS**

Rhine test

Game *Reichswald* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Format** *Cassette* **Price** *£4.95* **Supplier** *Merry & Wallace 12 Lawnswood Avenue, Chasetown, Walsall, WS7 8YD*

REICHSWALD is a simulation of the American attempt to secure a bridgehead over the Rhine in 1945. As the American commander,you must capture the city areas within a certain time to win the game.

During loading you are presented with the symbols for the various units and the terrain. When ready, you type in 'y' if you want a saved game or 'n' if you want a new game. Then you sit back and wait. It takes a while for the cursor to appear, so don't unplug thinking you've got a dud cassette; just be patient.

The game is fairly simple to play, though you need to read the documentation beforehand, so that you know what you are looking at, and how to input commands and move units.

I found it difficult to become enthusiastic about this game, despite its interesting features, because of the slow responses. This is its one major drawback, and is likely to deter the novice wargamer. Once you have positioned the units on the map, there is nothing more you can do except grin and bear it. The computer moves the Germans about, and then goes into the combat phase. Eventually, you get a status report which indicates your strengths and weaknesses. Then the results of the combat appear.

If it wasn't for the excruciatingly long delay in presenting these feedbacks, I think I could have found this game quite addictive. As it is I've not made more than a few moves in one session, and I'm not sure whether I have the inclination to see the battle through to the bitter end.

Those who are chess fanatics, or enjoy similar games which require strategic planning rather than quick reactions, may well disagree. Personally, I'd rather play this sort of game with people, who don't always have the cold logic of a computer. **JF**

Gerrard Bros — problem solvers

Book *The Adventurer's Notebook* **Author** *Mike Gerrard* **Book** *The Adventurer's Companion* **Author** *Mike and Peter Gerrard* **Publisher** *Duckworth Home Computing* **Price** *£3.95 each*

THE GERRARD Brothers make a formidable team — writing almost without stop in such disparate and august organs as *Popular Computing Weekly*, *Honey*, *The Daily Mail* and *Micro Adventurer*, they form an adventure Mafia. Peter has an admirable series of "Exploring Adventures on the . . ." (fill in the dots with just about any micro that you can think of), although these two books are the first efforts of brother Mike to appear in print.



The more interesting of the two, for the general reader, is Mike's solo effort. The *Notebook* contains 5 pages of "What is an Adventure", 11 pages of hints (such as type LOOK and EXAMINE at every available opportunity, map mazes and so on), and 11 pages of historical background. These sections are followed by a quick look at various machines and the range of adventures available for them, a short list of synonyms and a list of books and magazines catering for the growing number of adventurers.

This is all pretty routine, but it is the second half of the book that will prove to be very useful — it takes the form of a series of "scratch-pads", on which the adventurer can keep track of the various games he may be in the process of solving. Thus, there is a column in which the description of each location is recorded, along with a column for objects found in that location, actions tried and the results of those actions. Then there are columns in which recognised verbs and nouns can be recorded, and finally a network of boxes which can be built into a map of the adventure. This format is repeated for up to 10 adventures, and if you use a pencil, then the book can be used indefinitely.

As the book is spiral-bound, it can lie flat beside the micro — and as a dedicated dedication-reader, I loved Mike's: "to my Nan". All together: Aaahh!

The Adventurer's Companion is just as useful in helping the player keep track of his adventure, but it is concerned with just four games, and is nothing less than a crib sheet! No room, here, for the history of computer adventures, or overviews of available software. Instead, there is nothing but the complete solutions to *The Hobbit*, Scott Adams' *Pirate Adventure* and *Adventureland*, and as well as the granddaddy of them all, Crowther and Woods' *Colossal Cave Adventure*, in the Level 9 incarnation.

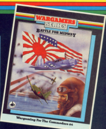
Rather than working through the solution move-by-move, the Gerrards offer instead a list of all the problems, directing the player to a numbered paragraph in which that particular problem is fully explored. At the end of the book are maps pertaining to each adventure.

For anyone stuck in The Goblin's Dungeon, or who is having trouble recovering his treasure from the Pirate's Chest, *The Adventurer's Companion* should prove to be just that — if you are weak-willed, however, and can't resist peeking, then beware! **TB**

Wargaming For The Commodore 64

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DATE: 4th June 1942,

PLACE: MIDWAY ISLAND

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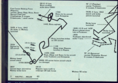
The game is played on three levels - firstly you are given a large scale map showing an overview of your own forces. Secondly you have constantly updated details of those forces down to the last fighter. Thirdly we give you a visual representation of the battle and your forces at every stage.

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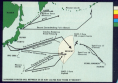
THE AUTHOR
Alan Steel is one of the original UK wargamers and has been playing and designing wargames for nearly twentyfive years.



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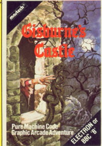
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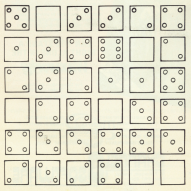


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This month, the task she has set you is to find the H ring, which is secured in a booby trapped chamber. On the door is this control panel, about which Tisch, as usual, knows little. She has discovered, however, that you must press an H shaped array of buttons on the panel. Of all the ways you could do this, the one safe solution is that which involves the lowest number of spots (add up the spots on all the buttons pressed).



You have, of course, no trouble at all in opening the door. What is the number of spots on all the buttons touched?

To enter the competition, mark on the diagram of the panel the buttons that have to be touched, and also tell us the total number of spots on those buttons.

The July competition attracted a bumper collection of entries. Obviously a lot of people were given an Incentive to win. The tie breaker justified its existence this time! The answer is D6, and the decoded message reads "go east from Vran's door one mile and dig".

We don't have space to list all the winners, so here are the names of the top five, based on their tie breakers: Valerie Snelling of East Grinstead, Terry Freshwater of Cannock, M. Griffiths of Poole, Malcolm Dixon of Cheshunt, and Neil Talbot.

The solution to this month's problem will be published in November. The 25 winners will get *Questprobe — The Hulk* from Adventure International. The tie breaker is in two parts; first, who is the chief examiner based on, and second, how many words of four or more letters can you make from the word Adventure?

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